

TAKING CHARACTER SERIOUSLY:
TOWARDS A THEORY OF VIRTUE IN ORGANIZATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION
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A widespread belief among moral philosophers holds that ethics is concerned fundamentally with questions of right and wrong actions. There is also a popular view among social scientists that the key subject matter of business ethics is ethical decision-making and ethical behavior.

This is not a dissertation about rights, wrongs, and obligations. It is not a dissertation about ethical decision-making or behavior either. For the moral life is much more than principles and rules. And the morality of business involves much more than right and wrong decision and conduct.

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the development of a theory of virtue in organizations that takes character seriously. It relies on the stipulation that moral traits of character are ethically more basic than moral principles. We are to understand what it is to behave virtuously through studying the nature and tendencies of the virtuous person.

The contribution of this dissertation to the status quaestionis in business ethics research is fourfold. First, it offers an original account of why normative theories must be psychologically realistic in the field of business ethics by elaborating on the old

philosophical dictum that ‘ought implies can.’ Second, this dissertation articulates an account of virtue that is distinctively character-based – preserving the primacy of character in normative theorizing – and provides a conceptual analysis of character traits – which is necessary to grant virtue ascriptions and understand the individual differences that underlie trait attributions. Third, this dissertation supplies ten decisive arguments to refute the situationist attack and the empirical evidence on the existence of virtues and character traits. Fourth, this dissertation offers an account of role virtues that can successfully deal with the problem of role morality by integrating the demands of social affiliations, institutions, and universal values, which are not characteristically in conflict.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ten years ago, I was engaged in politics in Argentina. The experience was tremendously inspiring and rewarding. Now and again, I still think that politics is the most honorable profession in a community, the highest of all human endeavors, the master science. One of the reasons that led me to be passionate about it was the realization that being in politics made me a better person.

One of the most important accomplishments of writing this dissertation on Aristotelian moral philosophy is that it has made salient the aspiration of becoming a better person. After five years of thinking for ourselves about what it is to be benevolent, just, compassionate, and so on, we already have developed views and attitudes. Ethical thinking fundamentally involves an ambition to be better than we are. If we are thinking ethically we are striving to reach an ideal that we have not yet attained and that we may never attain.

This work is intended as a contribution to the development of a systematic, comprehensive framework for thinking about the moral evaluation of character and persons in organizations. The theory develops from the postulation that I have to improve myself; no teacher, no book, no code of conduct, no authority can do the job for me.

I have had the great fortune of being guided in this journey by a number of friends and colleagues. As Aristotle holds, friendship is part of a complete and self-sufficient life. It involves sharing the activities one counts as especially important in one's life, i.e., the sharing of reasoning and thinking.

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inspiring philosophical discussions, friendship, wisdom, loyalty, and endless support. If every passage due to Ed Hartman was mentioned in the footnotes, there would be a hundred of these notes at least.

As should go without saying, I am responsible for any errors to be found herein.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my wife and best friend Rosana and to our son Hipólito. Without their love and ongoing support I could not have accomplished this work. And it is dedicated to my parents and siblings, and all those who provided the grounds for the development of my identity and the opportunities for the cultivation of good character traits.

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INTRODUCTION

A widespread belief among moral philosophers holds that ethics is concerned fundamentally with questions of right and wrong, that is, with the question of “what ought I to do?” which should be addressed through the formulation of principles of duty. There is also a popular view among management scholars and empirically oriented business ethicists that the key subject matter of business ethics is ethical decision-making and ethical behavior.

This is not a dissertation about rights, wrongs, and obligations. And it is not a dissertation about ethical decision-making or behavior either. For the moral life is much more than principles and rules. And the morality of business involves much more than right and wrong decision and conduct.

Persons matter. Character matters. Motivations matter. They will be, in this investigation, the basic starting points for the development of a theory of ethics in organizations. Actions and behavior certainly matter as well. But my claims here will be primarily about the ethical significance of what lies behind actions and behavior.

Consider the case of Jim, Jeff, and Robert. They are working extra hours to help install the organization’s new computer system, which must be ready by early October. Jim does not view his action as a sacrifice at all because he is motivated by the satisfaction that comes from helping his coworkers, customers, and the organization in general. In contrast, Jeff derives no personal satisfaction from taking care of the system; he does it purely from a sense of obligation. And Robert makes the sacrifices only for two reasons, namely, because of the extra pay and from fear of other people’s

disapproval. While the three of them do what is presumably right and nothing at all that is wrong, one should say that Jim's day is going better morally.

Some motivational states are just occurring states; they do not last long. Others are more enduring. The latter count as traits of character. Some motivational states encompass merely a capacity for good deeds. Others involve, among other things, a settled and internally rooted inclination to perform good deeds stemming from the appropriate reasons. The latter counts as traits of character and, being good character traits, as virtues. These traits constitute the moral character of a person. And they are seen as establishing whether someone is a morally good person.

Whereas the ethics of character is a subject of growing attention in moral theory, the ethics of action remains a significant area of ethical studies. And whereas the development of character strengths will have priority here over issues of decision-making and behavior in organizations, we must acknowledge that character and behavior are not unrelated. For sound ethical judgments and appropriate conduct are part of what it means to possess a good moral character. The project of morality extends beyond a concern for autonomy and rightness to a concern for the adequate direction and expression of a wide array of attitudes and inner states that underlie human behavior.

Still, judgments of virtue and judgments of obligations are fundamentally different. We should preserve the distinction between virtuous character and virtuous actions. A virtuous person will probably have an inclination to act virtuously. But moral virtue requires not only good deeds but also appropriate inner states, which are constitutive of virtue. So, we distinguish actions that are merely in conformity with virtue from those actions that are performed from virtue, that is, from the appropriate internal

states. These are the truly virtuous actions in the sense that they are evidence of an element of good character.

In this dissertation, I shall argue that a virtuous character is neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure right action.

Consider the case of Luca, a tire salesperson. He sells his customers exactly what they want because he is well trained by his manager to meet the customer's needs; he is a great seller. But Luca detests his job and hates having to spend time with his customers; he does not care at all about being of service to people; he just wants his paycheck. I have no reason to complain that Luca's conduct violates any obligation to me; but have reasons to complain about his attitude. Similarly, even the most dishonest manager can perform an act of honesty; say for the sake of his reputation. And even the least courageous business executive can perform an act of courage; in the hope and desire of impressing bystanders. Hence, virtue is not a necessary condition for right behavior.

Furthermore, lack of attention may cause a person to fail to act in accordance with a duty she has. And an extreme situation, such as being physically threatened, may lead an agent to behave out of character and fail to recognize a duty as well. Lack of attention or a defective response to a bullying situation may not always manifest a character deficiency. Still, such a behavior, which is contrary to duty, is not a right action. Therefore, possessing a virtue is not a sufficient condition to ensure right action.

This conclusion may sound counterintuitive to those scholars who assume that the possession of a virtue unfailingly leads to the behavior that is associated with such a trait. "What kind of virtue is trait X if it does not guarantee that his possessor will act in an X-like manner under any circumstance?" they might ask. Or, to put this claim in a different

way, the possession of a character trait reliably entails the behavioral manifestation of that trait, not only under circumstances that favor its expression but also under difficult circumstances. Cross-situational stability and cross-temporal stability are part of what it means to have a certain character trait, the argument goes. Otherwise, traits constituting virtues will lack any descriptive or explanatory power.

However, what explains cross-situational and cross-temporal behavioral variations need not be the same as what explains the behavior itself. For instance, while the differences in the rolls of two round balls cannot be explained by appeal to their roundness – since they are the same in that respect – either roll might still be explicable to a large extent through the roundness of the rolling object. Likewise, behavioral variation may not be fully explicable by appeal to traits, while still the behavior itself is so explicable. So, I shall argue, we can still use virtues in explanations of behavior in organizations.

This dissertation is intended as a contribution to the development of a theory of virtue in organizations that takes character seriously. It relies on the stipulation that moral traits of character are ethically more basic than moral conduct. We are to understand what it is to behave honestly, benevolently, and courageously through studying the nature and tendencies of the honest, the benevolent, and the courageous person respectively.

An important strength of any ethical theory is its ability to identify persons of good character. The very project of moral education and overall evaluation of persons would be hindered without relying on aretaic notions.

This dissertation is, also, an attempt to contribute to the development of a theory of moral worth in organizations, that is, a theory of praiseworthiness and

blameworthiness. We are blameworthy for acts of bad character – or absence of good character traits – as well as praiseworthy for acts of good character. And the amount of praise or blame we deserve varies depending on the depth of our motivation or the extent of our indifference. Virtue concepts are basic in a theory of moral rightness. And they are fundamental in a theory of moral worth.

A full theory of virtue should respond to a host of questions that are beyond the scope of a single doctoral dissertation: What is a virtue? What is a vice? Which character traits are virtues and which vices? What is it to possess a virtue? What makes a character trait a virtue? How are the virtues acquired, developed, and retained? Can character be chosen or self-developed? To what degree are the virtues united and functionally interdependent? How do the virtues function within the whole of a person's character? What is the link between virtue and behavior? Are there out-of-character actions? Are the virtues the same for everyone, everywhere, everywhen, or do they differ from culture to culture, from time to time, or even from person to person? What are the virtues appropriate to the world of business and bureaucratic organizations? Are they different from ordinary virtues?

I shall attempt here to respond to four of the questions listed above and sketch an outline of how the whole set of questions must be addressed.

The bulk of this dissertation is devoted to a conceptualization of virtue that takes character seriously. For a definition of virtue in terms of deontic notions fails to appreciate two important distinctions. First, the territory of virtue is larger than that of right decisions and actions. For instance, we are justified in feeling certain emotions like sympathy for the victims of the Bhopal tragedy and other events that have occurred in the

past in spite of the fact that we cannot perform any action in response to them. And virtue is much more than behavioral dispositions, as virtue depends on appropriate inner states, including desires, motives, emotions, and beliefs. Second, even though virtues do manifest in actions, they are better seen as a sort of goodness than as a sort of rightness, in the sense that virtue does not entail that the agent owes it to someone else to act or not act in a certain way.

As a theory of virtue, the theory to whose development I intend to contribute should overcome the shortcomings of competing ethical theories in business ethics, specifically, consequentialism, deontology, and contractualism. Virtue ethics entails a more psychologically sensitive theory. Consequentialism, deontology and social contract theory are too rationalistic and not sensitive enough to tensions among values and competing goods. In contrast, virtue ethics avoids the difficulties associated with excessive cognitivism and restitutes the proper moral worth of the agent's commitments and well-being in normative theorizing. And it does not require that the agent alienates from her own self and her projects.

The theory of virtue advocated here provides a better fit with our moral experience in life and in business organizations. As a matter of fact, we do not judge nor make decisions on the basis of abstract rules or universal principles but, rather, on the basis of whether the decision fits well with the sort of person we are and with what a person of good character would do under the circumstances. Second, we are not typically capable of attaining full impartiality. And even if there are a few rare cases of persons who can treat the interests of everyone impartially, these are not the sort of people we should want there to be. For a web of close relationships is a necessary condition of a

good life and those special ties create special demands on us. Third, the theory of virtue defended here requires consistency between cognitions and desires, as opposed to those theories that advocate doing what duty dictates regardless of whether the agent is motivated to act in accordance with what duty dictates. Fourth, the theory of virtue defended here is concerned with the whole span of a human life rather than a particular action; it is concerned with character and human activity rather than isolated behavior.

This dissertation is also a contribution to the moral psychology of the virtues. It is part of Anscombe's research program; we need an adequate moral psychology, which she and her contemporaries lacked in the fifties, to appreciate the superiority of aretaic notions such as 'just' or 'compassionate' over the thinner concepts of 'right' and 'wrong.' Moral psychology encompasses two dimensions. The normative dimension sets standards of thinking, desiring, and behaving. The empirical dimension is concerned with the nature and the function of reasoning, cognition, emotions, and attributions. The standard view holds that the normative dimension is logically independent from empirical psychology, in the sense that even if unattainable, normative standards can function as ideals. There is an ethics of rules with which we are expected to comply, and there is an ethics of ideals whose role is to push us in the direction of striving to come as close as we can, even if we cannot attain perfection. So, whether persons can reach these normative standards is irrelevant to the project of setting and justifying those standards.

But moral demands are constrained by the limits of human motivation. For even if there are rare cases of saints and heroes, what is expected from human beings is less demanding than the behavior of saints and heroes. Ought implies can. And normative research in ethics – especially in the field of business ethics – must be constrained by

psychology and the psychological structures those normative theories presuppose.

Whereas some normative theories fail to provide realistic moral standards and so become indefensibly utopian, our current common sense morality – especially in the world of business and bureaucratic organizations – adopts such an overly relaxed interpretation of our psychological capacities that it is seriously undemanding.

Still, the distinction between moral standards and moral ideals remains. Surely mere facts about how people are and behave do not invalidate an account of how people ought to be and behave. But this is a problem that affects not only normative ethical theories that assign a primary role to moral ideals. Indeed, the models of rationality available to us do not tell us how people actually reason but how we ought to reason. And the psychological evidence on cognitive biases makes clear that people do not do it how they ought to. We have an unrealistically positive view of our self; we highlight our positive characteristics and discount others' negative traits; we give ourselves more responsibility for our successes and take less responsibility for our failures than we extend to others; we credit ourselves for our efforts but credit others only for their achievements; we overestimate the likelihood that we will experience good future events and underestimate the likelihood of bad future events; we exaggerate the extent to which we can control random events. Furthermore, some people often act for rational or even moral reasons without knowing that they are acting from them. And often people hold irrational beliefs that are caused by emotions and feelings without the intervention of their own agency. And there are even cases of people stating moral beliefs that are at odds with the way they feel and behave.

Normative reflection is constrained by knowledge of the architecture of the mind, personality and social psychology, and the limits of rationality. Hence, a theory where character and its components are the central concern of morality must recognize the importance of the social sciences to normative ethics.

To recap, this dissertation is about the ethics of character in the context of organizations. It is intended as a contribution to the development of a theory of virtue in organizations that takes character seriously, that is, a theory where aretaic concepts are essential in an account of moral worth and in account of moral obligation. Character concepts are not to be reduced to deontic or axiological notions. And virtues are not to be reduced to behavioral dispositions to act rightly, not even as a disposition to try to act rightly. We certainly do expect the person of good character to try to act rightly and to succeed in doing so. But the reduction of virtue to behavioral dispositions offers such an impoverished account that it deprives virtue of its very essence. Since virtues are entangled notions that bring together explanations and evaluations of behavior (and persons), a theory of virtue must meet the requirement of psychological realism, that is, it must be proven that its demands are not beyond the capacity of the sort of people that, on other important grounds, we should want there to be.

At this point, a clear statement of the nature and significance of my contribution is in order. The intended contribution of this dissertation to the status quaestionis in business ethics research is fourfold:

First, this dissertation offers an original account of why normative theories must be psychologically realistic in the field of business ethics by elaborating on the old philosophical dictum that ‘ought implies can.’ The current business ethics literature either

denies or overemphasizes the gap between normative and descriptive approaches to business ethics research but it does not address the problem in terms of psychological realism.

Second, this dissertation articulates an account of virtue that is distinctively character-based – in the sense that virtue cannot be reduced to behavioral dispositions to behave rightly. It also provides a conceptual analysis of character traits, which, I submit, is necessary to grant virtue ascriptions, especially for cases where two or more traits are observationally equivalent. This difficulty has been mostly neglected by the psychological and management literature on virtues, even by the literature on positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship that are primarily concerned with what they call character strengths.

Third, this dissertation supplies ten decisive arguments to refute the situationist attack on virtue ethics. In that respect, my strategy is distinctive from previous replies to the situationist challenge on the existence of character traits, which either concede too much to the situationist – in terms of his definition of what virtues are – or take for granted the standard interpretation of the situationist data in experimental social psychology.

Fourth, this dissertation offers a solution to the question of how it is that occupying a professional or corporate role makes permissible – or even required – what would be otherwise impermissible or prohibited. I advance an account of role virtues that avoids the problem of role morality by integrating the demands of social affiliations, institutions, and universal values. Hence, I argue that there are no genuine conflicts

between role morality and ordinary morality because roles are a fundamental part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life.

Once again, it is not the goal of this dissertation to provide a full theory of virtue but rather a contribution to the development of such a theory.

A brief outline may help guide the reader through this project. The dissertation is organized into five chapters. First, the stage needs to be set with a justification of the project and the articulation and defense of the requirement of psychological realism as a constraint on normative theories. Once this has been achieved, the structure of the theory of virtue advocated here is presented. The dissertation progresses from the conceptualization of virtue to the consideration of the moral status and the psychological status of character traits, to the examination of the argument on the non-existence of character traits, and to the discussion of the alleged discontinuities between role virtues and ordinary morality.

Chapter one deals with the role of normative theorizing in business ethics, the constraints set by psychological facts on normative theories, and the structure of the theory of virtue to whose development I aim to contribute. I argue that normative theories have a unique role for the development of academic business ethics. But they need to meet the requirement of psychological realism, whose formulation will be derived from the old philosophical dictum that ‘ought implies can.’ I present three arguments for psychological realism, discuss a number of objections to these arguments – including the objection that psychological realism conflicts with the *is/ought* thesis, and conclude that normative theories in business ethics should be psychologically realistic. Next I sketch the structure of the theory of virtue to whose development I intend to contribute. And I

defend the claim that such a theory will fare better than competing normative theories in business ethics because virtues are entangled notions that bring together the descriptive and the normative dimension of morality and because aretaic notions rely on a more realistic picture of human motivation. Finally, I discuss three constraints posed by the requirement of psychological realism in any theory of virtue. And I conclude that the theory of virtue advocated here can meet these requirements.

Chapter two articulates the notion of virtue defended here in connection with the discussion of the status of character in normative ethics. It provides a survey of the philosophical and social scientific literature on virtue and character strengths. And it critically examines alternative conceptualizations of virtue and vice. Virtues are defined as distinct from skills and abilities because the target of virtue must have a breadth appropriate to the role character plays in our lives. And virtues are defined as different from behavioral dispositions to follow certain moral principles. I raise four objections against the dispositional account of virtues. And I argue that a dispositional analysis of virtue does not take character seriously for it deprives the essence of virtue and minimizes the role of aretaic notions in normative theory and business ethics. I argue for a non-reductive account of virtue that conceptualizes virtues as character traits and character as a person's collection of higher-order and first-order desires, values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that have any bearing on moral matters. This account is non-reductive because none of these elements of character are reducible to another, even if they are interrelated. Finally, this chapter illustrates the differences between reductive and non-reductive conceptualizations of virtue with a discussion of the virtues of gratitude and self-respect. The conclusion of this chapter is

that a theory of virtue which describes character in terms of only one of these components is incomplete and fails to give character its proper role in normative theorizing.

Chapter three is devoted to the psychology of virtue attribution, that is, to the examination of how we ascribe virtues to ourselves and others, what the functions of character attributions are, and whether these folk psychological attributions can capture the individual differences that underlie people's behavior. I examine the distinction between personality and character traits and review the psychological literature on attribution theory. Then, I critically assess the claim that theorizing about character is irrelevant for ascriptions of virtue. And I argue that a linear conception of traits – according to which virtues bear a direct correspondence with behavior – fails to take into account the possibility that two or more traits come into conflict thereby being observationally equivalent. Folk psychological ascriptions of virtue assume the existence of some underlying internal state of the agent that causes her behavior. Chapter three tracks the causes of individual differences in behavior through the investigation of the philosophical problem of *akrasia* in decision making.

Chapter four is concerned with the reality of virtue and vice and the recent challenge by situationist philosophers and social psychologists on the fragility of virtue. On the basis of a sizable body of empirical evidence accumulated during the last seventy years in experimental social psychology, Situationism poses a serious objection to virtue ethics, namely, that there are no character traits, and so traits are irrelevant in predictions and explanations of behavior in organizations. If character traits of the sort postulated in chapter two do not exist, then the theory advocated here cannot meet the requirement of

psychological realism and so there would be enough grounds for rejecting the theory. Only a theory of virtue that disposes of aretaic notions could survive the situationist attack, the argument goes. But I demonstrate that the theory of virtue outlined in chapter one is proof against the situationist sort of challenge. My argument against Situationism is twofold. First, taking into account the conclusions of chapter three, I argue that Situationism relies on a misinterpretation of the empirical evidence in experimental psychology. A summary of the large literature on dispositional effects in personality psychology and organizational scholarship is also presented in this chapter. Second, and on the basis of the non-reductive conceptualization of virtue offered in chapter two, I conclude that the notion of virtue operationalized by the experimenter is conceptually inadequate.

Chapter five is focused on the dimension of virtue that has to do with personal affiliations and institutional roles. No one would choose to live a solitary life; we are social animals. Social relations are among the highest goods in life and some are good in themselves. Different types of social relations are supported by allegedly distinctive character traits and obligations. But major difficulties arise when, as it is alleged, the demands of roles conflict with ordinary morality. A theory of virtue should justify special treatment to personal relations and to the members of the agent's community on grounds that appeal to the morally significant features of those bonds. But such treatment must be consistent with some form of universal respect and concern for everyone. Defending a list of virtues demands first that we establish what character traits are essential to a good life, which in turns demands that we give content to the idea of the good life. The theory of virtue defended here assumes a view on human nature and the purpose of life. What are

the character traits that make for a good business executive? A number of virtue ethicists would readily say that the virtues in business coincide with the virtues in ordinary life. Others may disagree. A person must be compassionate *qua* human being in a way she is not required to be *qua* business manager. A businessman may be allowed to conceal or bluff his position while conducting business negotiations but the ordinary virtue of honesty may not allow him to behave that way in his personal life. If the only purpose of business is the maximization of wealth for the stockholders, then some ordinary vices may be required for a successful business life. Chapter five examines the conflict between role demands and ordinary morality. I substantiate the claim that action-based moral theories do not provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of role morality. And I propose a virtue ethical account of roles that accommodates the injunctions of institutional roles and ordinary morality.

CHAPTER ONE

VIRTUE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM

“(...) it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking.”

Elizabeth Anscombe, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, p. 186.

“Practical philosophy (that is, the science of how man ought to behave) and anthropology (that is, the science of man’s ethical behavior) are closely connected, and the former cannot exist without the latter: For we cannot tell whether the subject to which our consideration applies is capable of what is demanded of him unless we have knowledge of the subject. It is true that we can pursue the study of practical philosophy without anthropology, that is, without knowledge of the subject. But our philosophy is then merely speculative, and an idea. We therefore have to at least make some study of man.”

Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, p. 2.

Moral philosophy and business ethics have recently turned to topics in moral psychology. There are different ways to approach these clusters of issues. Social scientists and so called experimental philosophers study moral psychology as an empirical domain, primarily concerned with descriptions and predictions of human thoughts, emotions, and behavior. On the other side of the spectrum, normativity is understood as an autonomous domain, exclusively concerned with what people ought to do, which can be studied mostly in abstraction from human psychology.

This dissertation is intended as part of a project of reconciliation between the normative and the descriptive traditions in business ethics and moral psychology.¹ The very idea of ‘reconciliation’ concedes the existence of a gap; the word reflects the current status of the field and the perceptions in the business ethics community.

While accepting the distinction is legitimate, I submit that keeping normativity and description isolated from each other will hinder the progress of the field. There is no absolute fact/value distinction in ethics; the normative and the psychological are interpenetrated. And part of our descriptive vocabulary is indeed both factual and value-laden. Normativity is about reasons for actions, that is, considerations that count for and against actions in deliberation. But reasons can be normative only if they are considerations that agents can acknowledge and comply with. Hence, psychological facts impinge on normative theorizing by setting feasibility constraints; normative theorizing must attend to the psychological capacities that undergird normative response. And normative theories must be psychologically realistic. For it would be difficult to defend the normative validity of a moral conception if it did not have any contact with our moral psychology; for example, if the sort of persons required for its realization were impossible.

As explained in the introductory remarks, I aim to contribute to the development of a theory of virtue in organizations, in which aretaic notions are conceptually prior and more fundamental than deontic concepts. A central component of the project consists in providing a psychological account of character. Such an account will be superior to competing business ethics theories in that it will supply a natural account of moral

¹ My endeavor is to recognize and explain the entanglement of fact and value in business ethics rather than to synthesize normative and descriptive approaches and methods of research in business ethics, which would be more problematic. I thank Nien-hê Hsieh for raising this concern.

motivations while bringing together explanations and evaluations of behavior in organizations. For virtues are entangled notions. And judgments about character are responsive to matters of facts and matters of valuation.

Chapter one is devoted to the justification of this project, namely, a contribution to the development of a theory of virtue that takes character seriously. In this chapter, I shall defend the claim that normative theorizing has a unique role in the advancement of academic business ethics. But, I shall argue, normative theories should meet a requirement of psychological realism, which is derived from the *ought-implies-can* principle. I shall also sketch the features of a theory of virtue in organizations, and conclude that such an account fares better than competing normative theories in business ethics because virtues are thick ethical concepts and because such a character-based account will supply a more realistic account of moral motivation.

The chapter is organized as follows. In section one, I shall summarize the state of the discussion in academic business ethics and highlight the unique role of normative theorizing in business ethics. In section two, I shall introduce an important constraint on normative theories; namely, the requirement of psychological realism, and I will discuss three arguments and four objections against the constraint. In section three, I shall examine the *fact/value* dichotomy and raise a number of objections against it. In section four, I shall sketch the structure of the theory of virtue to whose development I intend to contribute. In section five, I argue for the understanding of virtues as entangled notions and defend the claim that a character-based moral theory passes the test of psychological realism. Section six concludes.

1.1. NORMATIVE THEORY IN BUSINESS ETHICS RESEARCH

As an academic field, business ethics is concerned with the philosophical examination of issues in organizational life – particularly at the corporate level – that are matters of moral evaluation.² It has evolved from an obscure discipline to one on the cutting edge of applied ethics. Historians of the field agree that it has existed – as a discrete study field – only since the early 1960s. De George (2005) dates the development of academic business ethics to the 1960s, when changing attitudes towards business in the United States – in the context of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement – led corporations to respond to public attack and criticisms appealing to the notion of social responsibility. Along these lines, business schools responded to these growing social and corporate pressures by developing teaching and research initiatives on business and society and social issues in management.

In its early years, the study of business ethics questions was primarily undertaken by a handful of scholars whose academic home was the business schools. At that point, courses and textbooks were focused on legal and managerial issues and no systematic attention was devoted to ethical theory and normative research. But things changed during the 1970s, when a significant number of moral philosophers entered the discipline, bringing ethical theory and philosophical analysis to the examination of moral issues in business (Bowie, 2000). Academic business ethics emerged as a result of the intersection of moral theory with empirical studies and the analysis of cases. Bowie dates the first academic conference of the new field in 1974 (De George, 2005: 5). In that year, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) revised its

² Contrary to Marcoux (2007), Moore (2008) and other scholars, I will indistinctively refer to business ethics and organizational ethics.

accreditation standards to include ethical considerations. Three philosophically oriented business ethics anthologies appeared before 1980 and they found an eager market. Chasing after waves of corporate scandals, business ethics courses and seminars were exponentially developed in both business schools and philosophy departments. By 1988, U.S. colleges and universities associated with the AACSB reported that ethics as a curriculum topic was significantly covered at over 90% of the institutions (Schoenfeldt, McDonald, and Youngblood, 1991). And prominent endowed chairs were created at many American and European business schools during the 1980s and 1990s (Marcoux, 2008).

Even though it has been argued that business ethics was well established as an academic field by 1990 (De George, 2005: 9), it is still “a young, growing and changing field.” (Moriarty, 2008) The field is large and interdisciplinary by nature. Business ethicists often disagree among themselves over the precise scope of the discipline, debating whether the field should concern itself only with the ethical evaluation of pricing, contract negotiation, and settlement (Marcoux, 2008) or with a broader range of ethical considerations (Bowie, 2008).

More importantly, business ethicists also disagree on their metatheoretical assumptions; two longstanding traditions have been developed in business ethics research. One – *normative business ethics* – is roughly concerned with theories of how business persons ought to behave and how organizations ought to be governed. The other – *empirical (or behavioral) business ethics* – is concerned with how business persons do behave and how organizations are actually conducted, that is, with the antecedents and consequences of allegedly moral behavior. The former tradition has been developed by

professors of moral philosophy “taking what they know about ethics and ethical theory and applying it to business.” (Freeman, 2000: 169) Its research appears in *Business Ethics Quarterly* and mainstream philosophy journals and it is normally delivered at the Society for Business Ethics and at the Business Ethics chapter of the American Philosophical Association. The latter tradition – called “business and society” – has been developed in business schools by management scholars, most of whom have been trained as social scientists and it has a division of the Academy of Management (“Social Issues in Management”). Research on this tradition is reported in social science journals and delivered at management, sociology, and psychology associations.

A recent study on the number of empirical business ethics articles published over the last five decades has shown that the study of ethics in organizations has witnessed significant strides during this time period: from 10 articles in the period 1970-1979, to 54 articles during the period 1980-1989; 160 articles between 1990-1999, and 473 articles in the present decade (2000-2007). However, the authors of the study are “disappointed by the lack of representation in Academy of Management journals.” (Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe, 2008: 546) That is, indeed, a problem shared by both traditions of business ethics research. Academics working on business ethics have experienced an indifferent reception from their colleagues at both philosophy departments and business schools. Business ethics is “pretty much ignored by the profession” in philosophy (Bowie, 2000: 15), presumably because business does not entail a philosophically appealing endeavor and because most people in the arts and humanities find business and commerce wholly distasteful. In contrast, management scholars doubt whether ethicists have anything of interest to contribute to business. According to Freeman, “the mainstream conversations

in business have had little to do with the work of these philosophers” and business can ignore normative business ethics “without so much as a glance.” (2000: 169)

De George (2005) identifies three main features that differentiate normative from behavioral business ethics. First, normative business ethics has moral philosophy as its basis and intends to provide an ethical framework within which to assess business practices and corporate behavior. Hence, while empirical business ethics could defend a notion of corporate ethical behavior in terms of the wishes of the corporation or the law, normative business ethics is concerned with standards of behavior that are independent from the status quo (Freeman, 2000). Second, and as a result of the first point, normative business ethics is by definition critical of business practices and so not warmly welcomed by the business community as opposed to the initiatives in empirical business ethics which describe and explain the social impacts of business. Third, the scope of behavioral business ethics is broader and, perhaps, more interdisciplinary than normative business ethics research (De George, 2005: 6).

The aforementioned traditions have grown in isolation from each other. While ethical studies in organizational science have been inspired by the paradigm of the natural sciences and characterized by an objectivist and value-free approach, normative business ethics is focused on ideals that inform prescriptions and a rational critique of moral judgments as they pertain to business and organizations. On a personal note, I myself experienced the lack of a bridge between the normative and descriptive fields of business ethics in the very first semester of my Ph.D. program. I learned in a doctoral seminar on Organizational Behavior that a decision is ethical if it is “both legally and morally acceptable to the larger community.” (Jones, 1991) The behavioral literature in business

ethics, I was taught, refers to individual behavior that is evaluated “according to generally accepted moral norms of behavior.” (Trevino, Weaver and Reynolds, 2006) And the same was true regarding the conceptualization of value laden notions such as ‘trust’, ‘distributive and procedural justice’, ‘corruption’, so on and so forth. During the same semester, my professors of moral philosophy made it absolutely clear that such notions are independent of how people act as a matter of fact, because people at least sometimes fail to do what they are required to do, and because it is a categorical mistake to confuse substantive moral claims with mere descriptions of the ethical beliefs (e.g. corporate codes of ethics) of some group or society. Likewise, we learn in metaphysics and philosophy of the social sciences that attributions of collective agency and responsibility are not substantiated and still learn in organization theory and organizational behavior seminars that organizational culture decisively influences people’s behavior to the point in which it makes sense to blame corporations for their members’ conduct (indeed, this seems to be the rationale behind legal regulations such as the 1991 U.S. Federal Sentencing Guidelines, the 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act, and the 2003 U.N. Convention Against Corruption among others).

A number of scholars are quite skeptical about the value of applying moral philosophy to business and about whether we need business ethics scholars “with a thorough knowledge of moral theory.” (Rorty, 2006: 378) These experts claim that most of the work on normative business ethics is perceived as irrelevant and that it has not appeared in mainstream discussions of business and capitalism (Freeman, 2000). They also predict that the primary discipline of the next generation of business ethicists “will

not be philosophy; it will be management or one of the social sciences,” and that they will spend the bulk of their time in the business schools (Bowie, 2000: 17).

This dissertation is intended as a contribution to the reconciliation of normative theory and empirical studies in business ethics. Whereas I shall defend in this chapter the claim that the empirical and the normative inquiry are deeply and confusingly intertwined – especially in business ethics – I shall start by pointing out the important role of normative theorizing and the application of contemporary statements of prescriptive ethics to organizational life.

What can normative ethics uniquely contribute to applied ethics and, in particular, to business ethics as an academic field? Five tasks summarize the role that normative theory can play and should play in business ethics research. What the normative approach can characteristically contribute to business ethics research is a systematic inquiry into individual and organizational responsibility in business, as well as a critical approach to questioning our common sense judgments. Normative research can develop arguments to show how common sense morality provides an adequate response to certain moral issues in business, ranging from the justification of affirmative action, to the permissibility of sweatshops, to the examination of the possibility of character education in the workplace, to the conceptualization of corruption and bribery, to the definition of meaningful work, and so on. It should also strive to suspend the conventions of practice and reconstruct them with sound philosophical arguments. In addition, normative research can make a significant contribution at the level of theory providing the basis for a research agenda. And, as Bowie argues, the ethical theorist “can endorse one view as morally superior to the other,” something that cannot be accomplished by descriptive theories (2000: 10).

Finally, normative theories can (and should) be integrated into the work in management, organizational behavior, economics, organization theory, and other disciplines as they pertain to business ethics. In sum, normative theory is able to accomplishing these tasks that cannot be undertaken by behavioral business ethics and it can respond to questions that cannot be addressed by descriptive theories.

Normative studies in business ethics have a respectable philosophical pedigree. Moral philosophers helped establish business ethics as an academic field by adding to the area a conceptual framework as well as a methodology that had been previously lacking. Although Bowie observes that “relatively few normative business ethics articles have a normative theory as a theoretical base,” (in Smith, 2008: vii) there are a fair amount of articles with a systematic application of mainstream moral theories to economic systems, to the institution of business, and to business organizations. The following enumeration is not exhaustive but merely serves as an illustration. Bowie (1999) and his collaborators have productively pursued the application of Kantian theory to business ethics, including the interpretation and application of each formulation of the categorical imperative to moral issues in business, from meaningful work, to sweatshops, to a deontological theory of leadership. Snoeyenbos and Humber (1999), Gustafson (2006), Jensen (2001) and Easterbrook and Fischel (1991), among others, have defended consequentialist theories and the advantages (and limitations) of employing utilitarianism in business decision making. Friedman (1962), Lomasky (1987), Machan (2002), and Maitland (1989), among others, have applied libertarian theory to the examination of the social and moral responsibilities of business corporations above and beyond the law. Aristotelian scholars have articulated a virtue ethical approach to business. Solomon (1992), Hartman (1996),

Koehn (1998) and more recently Audi (2008) and Moore (2008), among others, have proposed a teleological framework to defining the responsibilities of individuals and corporations. They emphasize the priority of personal character over abstract rules and principles, the personal dimension of business, and the importance of the community in which the individuals and the organization are embedded. As it happened in other areas of applied ethics, the seminal work of John Rawls – the leading contemporary social contract philosopher – has been widely adopted and discussed in normative business ethics. Donaldson and Dunfee (1999), Keeley (1988), Hsieh (2008), and Wempe (2008) have brought contractarian ethical theory to business ethics. Donaldson and Dunfee's integrative social contract theory is regarded as the first original normative theory to be developed by business ethicists. Moreover, Rosenthal and Buchholz (2000) have incorporated the work of classical American pragmatists and Phillips and Freeman (2002) have used neo-pragmatism and postmodernism as normative frameworks for rethinking key theoretical and practical features in management and business ethics, from the problems of moral pluralism and individualism, to the fact-value distinction and environmental ethics. Wicks, Gilbert, and Freeman (1984), Calas and Smircich (1997), Derry (2002), and Borgerson (2007) have incorporated feminist theories and the ethics of care to the analysis of the role of morality in organizations. As a result, the work of Carol Gilligan, Virginia Held, Nel Noddings, and other theorists have led to the priority of empathy, healthy social relationships, and avoidance of harm over abstract moral principles.

In sum, normative theorists have already played a unique role in the progress of business ethics as an academic field. We are definitely fortunate that we can stand on the

shoulders of these distinguished scholars. This dissertation is written in the expectation of being a significant contribution to reinvigorating the interest and discussion of normative research in business ethics.

1.2. THE REQUIREMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM

In spite of the unique contributions of normative research to business ethics, we should recognize an important constraint on normative theorizing, especially in the field of business ethics, namely, the requirement of psychological realism. Moral theories too often neglect facts about human nature and society becoming, as a result, distorted and inadequate for our real needs. We have theorized in a vacuum, and so have failed to do so successfully. Normative theories must take seriously the kind of persons we are, what we can actually achieve, and the types of cognitive and motivational structures we have. As Griffin puts it while discussing how moral theories and decision procedures are restricted by our human abilities:

“such <moral > norms and relations must be tailored to fit the human moral torso. They are nothing but what such tailoring produces. There are no moral norms outside the boundary set by our capacities. These are not some second-best standards – standards made for everyday use by agents limited in knowledge and will, and then, underlying them and sanctioning them, true standards, standards that make no compromise with human frailty. A moral standard that ignores human capacities is not an ‘ideal’ standard, but no standard at all.” (Griffin, 1996: 105)

Psychological facts impinge on normative ethics by setting constraints of feasibility. Admittedly, the constraints on normative ethics are highly controversial but I submit that most moral philosophers – especially those in business ethics – will concur with the claim that a normative theory should be firmly ingrained in human nature if it is going to be satisfactory at all. Or, to put it in a different way, a normative theory should

rely on a moral psychology bearing a recognizable resemblance to actual human psychologies. For a moral theory that is not realizable in principle by the creatures for whom it is intended places us under serious moral quandaries. Most moral theorists believe that being unrealistic does not count in favor of a moral psychology. And one may even say that there might be enough grounds for rejecting a normative theory if it depicts a way of life that is psychologically unrealizable. As Alvin Goldman puts it, “A moral code that is psychologically unrealizable by human beings, or just too demanding or difficult for people to satisfy, might be rejected on metaethical grounds.” (1993: 358)

1.2.1. Strong and Minimal Realism

The standard case to discuss how psychological realism poses a constraint on normative theory is with regard to what is realistic to expect in the way of adherence to impartiality and impersonal values. Morality is usually associated with impartiality. Indeed, philosophers often use the expression ‘moral point of view’ and ‘impersonal point of view’ interchangeably, referring to the impartial perspective from which moral judgments are supposed to be made (Wolf, 1992; Scheffler, 1985). The moral significance of the impersonal point of view is that from it, every moral agent counts equally; no one is considered intrinsically more significant than anyone else; our lives are not more important than the lives of others (Scheffler, 1992). That is, it is generally agreed that there is a close connection between impartiality and equality (Nagel, 1991). The problem for these agent neutral normative theories – which defend moral impartiality and impersonal values – is that it is constitutive of being a person that one has a distinctive point of view and a distinctive set of grounds projects and commitments, which – we might say – give each life the meaning it has. Furthermore, as a matter of

(psychological) fact, most human beings favor their personal interests and values, special relationships, and personal commitments, as the empirical evidence in social psychology indicates (Tajfel, 1970; Brewer, 1991; Messick and Bazerman, 1996). Both Freud (1930) and Nietzsche (1887) attacked traditional morality as psychologically unrealistic in its demands for caring about others, neglectful of human needs for self-affirmation, and the source of needless depression and anxiety. They both identified guilt as the cause: society generates “the deep sickness” of guilt or bad conscience and lessens happiness “through the heightening of the sense of guilt.” In calling for a healthy value perspective, Freud and Nietzsche caution about the excesses of guilt and blame conventional morality. Freud and Nietzsche also call for greater psychological realism in acknowledging predominant needs for self-love and self-assertion.³

Consequently, those moral systems in which impartiality and equality have an essential place must recognize a constraint on what they demand based on these features of persons. Realism regarding the psychology of human beings suggests that ethical theories and moral systems should take into consideration the content and strength of personal motives.

According to Flanagan (1991), we should make a distinction between strong and minimal forms of psychological realism. Bernard Williams (1981) and Susan Wolf (1982) are advocates of strong realism. Williams was one of the first scholars defending the argument that those moral theories based on a principle of impartiality and impersonal moral standards undermine the integrity of personal projects and personal

³ Yet, Freud and Nietzsche underestimated the positive role of guilt and failed to acknowledge that psychological realism also implies appreciating human capacities of caring for others. Hence, their one-sided focus on the self, to the neglect of altruism and obligations is indeed dangerous. On a critical review of Freud and Nietzsche on psychological realism see Martin (2006).

relationships, which give life its very meaning. Because those “ground projects” make life meaningful and coherent for the agent, it is unreasonable (and unrealistic) for a moral theory to demand that the agent sets aside her ground projects if they conflict with the impartial perspective. Those are grounds for rejection of modern ethical theory – as opposed to ancient moral philosophy – because it sets such an unreasonable requirement. A sound moral system, according to Williams, would carefully recognize the importance of the agent’s personal ends, projects, and relationships, which are related to her existence and give a meaning to her life. Strong psychological realism endorses the following three theses. First, our commonsense reactions and intuitions constitute a powerful constraint on normative ethics. Second, the motivational structure required by a sound moral theory should not demand from the persons to whom the theory is addressed to become persons they themselves could not reasonably be expected to become without undergoing radical character transformation. Third, once a personality is above a certain threshold of ‘decency’, there are particular psychological goods such as integrity or commitment to one’s ground projects which need not yield in the face of impersonal demands. Strong realists believe that there are actual personalities and clusters of personalities that are good enough. Moral theory should not require more than what actual human beings with those personalities already give. Consequently, according to Williams, modern moral philosophy in either its utilitarian or deontological forms, should be rejected. An ethical conception, realists argue, should not require persons to abstract too heavily from their identity, it should not require persons to alienate themselves from their personal commitments, and it should not require persons to violate their integrity. Otherwise, it would be too demanding. This is, in short, the standard way of securing the

argument for strong psychological realism, the argument for the personal point of view, as it appears in Williams (1981).

In contrast, minimal realists are less sympathetic to the three theses explained above. They may ask us to create social conditions such that future generations may contain persons so different from us that we could not reasonably become those sorts of persons over our lifetime. Even though certain psychological goods such as integrity and self-esteem are good – as strong realists maintain – they create, at most, *prima facie* constraints on moral theory, according to minimal realism. Against strong realism, Flanagan believes that there is nothing unreasonable or irrational about, say, a Buddhist's commitment to a highly impersonal moral perspective. And minimal realism holds that it is sometimes reasonable for us to promote "generational moral change," that is, to teach future generations what we cannot ourselves learn. For example, while our own upbringing has placed a limit on how much we can possibly care for strangers here and today, we might teach our children to care for distant persons – instead of setting a limit on what impersonal morality can demand from future generations, because it is a very worthy moral ideal and because it is not necessarily alienating. Whereas strong realists argue that it is not natural to be alienated from personal relations and projects, minimal realists believe that the notion of what is natural or normal should be sometimes changed, eliminated, or transcended.

Whether the argument for the personal perspective is enough to win the case for strong realism is inconclusive. Even if we accept as a natural fact that most humans come to develop their ground projects by giving a disproportionate weight to their life and commitments, there are still many who come to possess the ability to override their

natural partiality, at least to a certain point, according to the minimalist account of realism. What follows from these minimalist assumptions is that any moral theory must acknowledge the separateness of persons, that ground projects and personal commitments give each life the meaning it has, and that all persons are partial to their projects. Thus, no ethical conception should reasonably require forms of impartiality and impersonality that ignore the constraints set down by these psychological features.

Flanagan argues that almost all traditions of ethical thought have a core commitment to minimal psychological realism, which can be summarized in the form of a metaethical principle, the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism (PMPR):⁴

“Make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing, and behavior prescribed are possible, or are perceived to be possible, for creatures like us.” (Flanagan, 1991: 32)

PMPR is not intended to establish the content of a sound moral theory because, obviously enough, the set of realizable moral psychologies is infinitely large.⁵ Rather, PMPR sets the minimal criteria for evaluating the potentialities of a moral system in light of what is known empirically about moral psychologies. Flanagan explains that “PMPR is meant to be both descriptive and prescriptive.” (1991: 33) PMPR picks out an aspiration of (most) moral theories and proposes a criterion for evaluating moral theories in terms of this aspiration.

⁴ See also Cooper (1981) for an earlier formulation of PMPR.

⁵ If your character is such that you cannot do action A, it does not follow that A is not obligatory. It is your fault that you have such a bad character, according to Aristotle. He acknowledges that one’s character is a function of one’s upbringing, but he explicitly rejects the inference that one is not responsible for it. The point of psychological realism is that we cannot explain human behavior by reference to virtues that no one can have.

1.2.2. Ought (Still) Implies Can

Thus far, I have introduced the notion and two possible versions of psychological realism but I have not provided arguments for it. Neither have I removed the ambiguities associated with such a requirement. For example, how should we understand the clauses “possible, or are perceived to be possible” and “for creatures like us” in the minimalist version of psychological realism? Flanagan originally intended PMPR “to restrict normative conceptions to those that could be realized by biologically normal *Homo sapiens* and remain stable under some possible social arrangements.” (1991: 340) Yet, some authors argue that such formulation does not work as a restriction at all (Doris, 2002). For even the most radical idealizations could meet the requirement of being “perceived to be possible.”⁶ Other scholars may think that perception of possibility is not strict enough (Wong, 2006).

Flanagan’s version of psychological realism is, I submit, a derivation – at the collective level – of a widely held principle in moral philosophy, namely, the *ought-implies-can* principle (“OC”). According to this principle, a person ought to perform an action only if the person can actually perform the action. It is unreasonable to require particular individuals to do what they cannot really do.

(OC) Necessarily, if X ought to Φ , then X is able to Φ .

The *ought-implies-can* principle has a rich history, which has been traced as far back as Augustine and Pelagius (Matthews, 1998; Kirwan, 1998) but is more customarily associated with Kant’s famous expression that “duty commands nothing but what we can do” (Kant, 1996: 92), although scholars disagree on how Kant understood the principle

⁶ Flanagan intends to allow for a moral system that is not possible but almost possible: “a regulative ideal might be asymptotically realizable by distant descents of ours, and thereby satisfy PMPR.” (1991: 340)

(Stern, 2004). Whereas (OC) is focused on individual motivations, psychological realism, as a metaethical principle, is pitched at the collective level. In other words, it holds that it is unreasonable to ask persons in general to have personalities, motivational structures, and behavior that they cannot possibly have.

Most of us find (OC) persuasive because it seems to be consistent with commonly held moral beliefs. (OC) provides a starting point for assessing the plausibility of psychological realism in normative business ethics.⁷ And (OC) has a fair claim to being common ground among moral philosophers, which makes sense when we consider that the bare principle suffers from the common defect of an ambiguous modal verb.⁸

How should we read (OC)? While most of us agree that ought implies ‘can,’ we disagree about what kind of ‘can’t’ it must be in order to defeat ought. We can start with a negative characterization. The sort of can’t that defeats ought is not to be found by considering the capacities of moral saints. As Griffin argues:

“It is undeniable that some rare human beings sacrifice themselves for others. So they can. So humans can. So we can. And so the question, Ought we? comes back to challenge us. At Auschwitz Father Maximilian Kolbe volunteered to take the place of another prisoner in a punishment detail, and went to his death. But that Father Kolbe, with his religious

⁷ Given its wide acceptance, (OC) has been used to doing the heavy lifting on a number of philosophical theses, including the argument that moral dilemmas are impossible (Gowans, 1987; Mason, 1996), the Principle of Alternative Possibilities – according to which a person is blameworthy for Φ -ing only if she could have done otherwise than Φ (Copp, 2003; Widerker, 1991), and the thesis that if determinism is true, no one ever acts wrongly (Haji, 2002).

⁸ Let me briefly state how I provisionally understand the two crucial notions of (OC). First, I take the ‘ought’ in (OC) to be a moral ‘ought’, as opposed to a prudential ‘ought’ or an epistemic ‘ought.’ (OC) states that if a person morally ought to do something, then she can do it. The ‘ought’ in (OC) is a *prima facie* obligation, as opposed to an all-things-considered moral obligation, that is, the obligation might be overridden or equally counterbalanced by other countervailing considerations. Finally, the obligation is objective, that is, it is what is the case about someone’s situation, as opposed to what someone is justified to believe to be the case. Second and more importantly, the ‘can’ in (OC) is the ‘can’ of capacity and opportunity to do the thing. Capacity refers to the possession of the requisite skills, knowledge, and physical abilities, even if psychologically the person feels he is not able to do the thing and even if his skills do not assure success. And opportunity refers to someone being in a situation that allows him to exercise his skills, knowledge, and abilities.

beliefs, could sacrifice himself does not show that we, with very different metaphysical beliefs, can too.” (1996: 89)

So, there are two claims here. First, some humans are capable of great self-sacrifice, thus, this is an indication that humans in general ‘can’; they are so capable. Second, Kolbe sacrificed himself, but this is no indication of the capacities of normative agents that we have in mind when we talk about human capacities. While the fact that selfless acts have been performed indeed demonstrates that those acts can be performed, this is not the sense of capacity most directly relevant to (OC). The construal of capacities then, in which an ordinary agent is capable of complete impartiality is not the construal appropriate to (OC). The second way of understanding the appropriate ‘can’t’, the one favored by Griffin, is agent-relative: the can’t that defeats ought is determined by the motivational capacities of some group of desirable, in a sense to be explained, normative agents. This account brings with it a problem: specifically, if (OC) is true, then it follows that different agents have different obligations and are subject to different moral rules. At the first sight, this conclusion seems unproblematic. If, due to circumstances beyond my control, I am unable to save the drowning child while you are capable, then you have a duty to save the child; I do not. But we can escape the conclusion that we have different sets of duties by making the content of the duty more specific, namely, it is not the case that you have a duty that I lack. Rather, we both have a duty to rescue the child when we can make it without risking our own lives. In sum, we are not to look to the capacities of moral saints to determine the sort of ‘can’t’ that defeats ‘ought.’

A second negative characterization of the ‘can’t’ that defeats ‘ought’ in (OC) is not to look to the behavior of agents acting at an extreme emotional pitch. To illustrate this claim, Griffin describes how...

“hundreds of students in Tiananmen Square autonomously went on hunger-strike and were prepared to die ‘to fight for the life that’s worth living’. But they were in special circumstances. They saw their lives as blighted, as not worth living. They saw an opportunity to change things, even if at great cost to themselves, and when they gave up hope of change, they gave up the hunger-strike too. Certainly people in exceptional circumstances can do exceptional things.” (1996: 90)

The actions of those in dire situations are not appropriate guides to the capacities of normative agents relevant to (OC). For moral standards should be standards for ordinary agents under regular circumstances. As such, they should be constrained by the capacities of ordinary agents in ordinary circumstances. As Griffin suggests, it is a “can’t by someone in ordinary circumstances with suitable, settled dispositions in a suitable social order.” (1996: 90) Like the youth in Tiananmen Square, when their children are threatened, mothers can often raise themselves to such emotional intensity that they acquire powers they otherwise normally lack. But that cannot be seen as evidence of what people are ordinarily capable of.

The underlying idea is that normative agents are not typically capable of certain states such as complete impartiality. We need a psychological solution to the problem that ethics is unrealistically demanding, which is provided by (OC). Ought implies can and we can do only so much. There is a sense of ‘can’t,’ ‘can’t absolutely.’ But that is not the kind of “can’t that defeats ought” because we cannot certainly maintain that complete impartiality is impossible in this absolute sense. At the other extreme, there is a second sense of can’t that applies: “can’t if one is living a prudentially good life in a non-oppressive society.” (Griffin, 1996: 90) This second sense entails a claim about the limits of human will which relies on heavy moral restrictions. So, the sense of can’t relevant to (OC) probably lies somewhere in between. The most relevant sense of can’t, then, must account for the agent-relativity of capacity. Moral rules are subject to a constraint arising

from the capacity of some particular subset of actual or possible normative agents, namely, those we should want there to be.

Griffin thereby uses what he calls the *requirement of psychological realism* as a fundamental determinant of what standards a moral theory can put forward:

“All ethical norms must meet a requirement of psychological realism. The rule ‘ought implies can’ enters here. One cannot, in the sense relevant to obligation, meet a demand if the demand is beyond the capacity of the sort of people that, on other especially important grounds, we should want there to be.” (2007; ch. 5: 4)

This formula avoids most of the problems associated with the previous understanding of the sense of capacity relevant to (OC), though ‘can’ seems to become normatively permeated and, we might even say, circular. In the next section of this chapter, I shall discuss the issue of whether psychological realism as a constraint on normative theorizing in business ethics must be understood only as an empirically-based constraint. For now, we should assess the arguments for (OC).

1.2.3. For and Against the (OC) Principle

The rough idea that underlies a strong reading of (OC) is, as we have seen before, that we need a greater degree of realism in ethics. We should begin by understanding the kind of persons we are and our capacities, as a first step to thinking about moral issues in business.⁹ Let us consider the question of whether a sound argument in support of (OC) can be articulated on such a foundation. There are three major arguments discussed in the

⁹ Moral systems and principles must be such that our believing and accepting them will determine action when conjoined with ‘normal’ human motivation (maybe not unfailingly but often enough to give the principle a point).

literature of (OC).¹⁰ Defenders of (OC) need not think that every argument for (OC) is a good one. I shall call them (1) the argument from motivation, (2) the argument from blame, and (3) the argument from ensuing inability.

Let us start with (1) the argument from motivation. We can derive (OC) from the principle that obligations are action-guiding, so while it makes sense to urge a person to fulfill his obligations, it is unreasonable to urge him to do what he cannot do (Hampshire, 1951; Margolis, 1967; Stern, 2004). An act cannot fall under a moral rule unless an agent is capable of obeying such a rule, otherwise there would be moral rules that do not engage with our motivational set and those moral rules would be just pointless. One may object that unachievable moral norms are not pointless because they can serve as sources of inspiration, i.e., as moral ideals (Stern, 2004). The defender of (OC) may respond that in order to try and behave according to some moral ideal, one must believe that one is capable of attaining such an ideal. And so the notion that moral rules may play the role of unachievable ideals which serve to motivate moral agents does not succeed. Those unconvinced by the argument from motivation may still attack the second assumption, namely, that there are no pointless moral rules. However, the subject matter here is the 'real' rather than the ideal, as befits someone writing about the world of business.

The argument from blame (2) suggests that (OC) is derived from the principle that it is not appropriate to blame someone for an act which she could not control. It is certainly reasonable to blame a person for failing to fulfill her duties, but it is not reasonable or fair to blame her for failing to do what she is unable to do (von Wright, 1963; Stocker, 1971; Fischer, 1999; Copp, 2003). Opponents of (OC) may draw a

¹⁰ My list is not exhaustive; there are far more than three arguments for (OC) but I am just introducing the three arguments that I find more plausible supporting (OC). See, for example, Sinnott-Armstrong (1988) and Stern (2004). Still, controversies remain on whether they have been successful establishing (OC).

distinction between act evaluation and agent evaluation such that in Φ -ing the agent does something wrong, without thereby doing anything blameworthy, that is, as an excuse instead of a justification.¹¹ As such, it might be that the agent ought to Φ in spite of the fact that she is unable to Φ . The argument from blame, the objection goes, does not provide a reason to suppose that an action's blameworthiness is indicative of its obligatoriness. (OC) does not hold because, according to the opponent, "the premise is about agents and the conclusion is about acts." (Sinnott-Armstrong, 1988: 114) And there are many cases where something ought to be done even though the agent would not be blameworthy for failing to do it, because it is not the agent's fault that she fails to do what she ought to do.¹² Defenders of (OC) may reply that the obligatoriness of an action does not attach to bare acts but crucially involves the agent. If X has a duty to Φ and Y has no duty to Φ , then Φ -ing cannot be obligated. Moreover, if virtually all humans – at least the kind of humans we should want there to be – cannot Φ , then we would probably accept that X, Y, and humans in general have no duty to Φ .¹³

Finally, the argument from ensuing inability (3) suggests that when we find out that a person cannot Φ , we take back the claim that the person ought to Φ and/or we rather ask what the agent ought to do instead of Φ (Frankena, 1950; Sinnott-Armstrong, 1984). In response, opponents of (OC) have provided a number of counterexamples

¹¹ Legal and moral philosophers distinguish justifications from excuses. To justify an action is to show that though the action is of a type that is usually wrong, under these circumstances it was not. By contrast, to say that an action is excused entails that the action was indeed wrong but the agent is not blameworthy, for reasons that may have to do with something about the agent, something about the circumstances of his behavior (conjoined with facts about humans in general), or both. In Chapter Five, I discuss the distinction between justifications and excuses regarding role obligations.

¹² There are complexities here that I shall go over quickly. For example, we do blame agents when they fail to do what they could not do if it is their own fault that they could not do it. For instance, we blame drunk drivers for not avoiding a crash which they could not avoid precisely because they got themselves drunk.

¹³ The objection still shows that a defender of (OC) owes some account of the link between blame and obligatoriness. However, the distinction between act-evaluation and agent-evaluation provides no reason to be skeptical about the existence of such a link.

wherein someone who is initially able to discharge an obligation remains bound by it even after she turns – culpably or inculpably – unable to discharge it. Suppose Prof. Ross has promised his students to bring to class this coming Tuesday a list of topics for their final papers; being a procrastinator, he failed to prepare the list and arrived in class on Tuesday without a list. If (OC) is true, then it is false on Tuesday that he ought to provide the list, because he is unable to do it. The conclusion is counterintuitive. Prof. Ross’s case is just a variant of the most discussed counterexamples to (OC):¹⁴

- A student idles his time and stays in his dormitory room at the time of his final examination – today at noon – thereby becoming unable to take the exam in the classroom at the very moment of the exam;
- A woman boards a plane to Paris this morning thereby becoming incapable of keeping her promise to marry her boyfriend, in Chicago, today at noon;
- A debtor is robbed ten minutes before the expiration date of a bank loan – today at noon – thereby becoming unable to repay the loan to the bank before the deadline.

In these examples, the obligation persists – so the argument goes – even after the inability is activated. The student still has a duty to complete the exam by noon, the woman still has a duty to marry her boyfriend in Chicago at noon, and the debtor still has a duty to repay the loan by the noon deadline. These counterexamples intend to show that the third argument for (OC) fails and that (OC) does not hold. The standard reply to this objection is that we do not say the duty persists after the inability sets in – which would prove (OC) false – but rather that the obligation expires after the inability begins and then

¹⁴ Here I follow Vranas (2007).

is followed by one or more new obligations. So, the student acquires an obligation to take the exam at another time, the bride acquires an obligation to let her boyfriend know and to excuse her absence, and the debtor acquires an obligation to repay the loan after the deadline. Neither the student, nor the bride, nor the debtor has the original obligation by noon; the obligation has expired. Opponents of (OC) may fight back by denying the claim that unfulfilled obligations expire (Sinnott-Armstrong, 1988). Or, they may suggest that the original obligation expires after the inability appears. In either case, opponents of (OC) need to separate the presence and the absence of the obligation in terms of what the agent can do. However, the claim that unfulfilled obligations never expire does not seem tenable, for it leads to the conclusion that I still have the obligation to submit my final paper for the seminar “Philosophy of Economics” by May 15, 2007, in spite of the fact that I missed that deadline and violated that obligation more than two years ago (and fulfilled the ensuing obligation by the end of May 2007). The opponent of (OC) may still resist. He might say that it is natural to say that X has a duty to Φ even after X’s inability begins. For example, the angry boyfriend may call the bride and say that she ought to be in Chicago by noon. But even if it natural to say so, it does not entail that the woman still has an obligation to be in Chicago given that she is in Paris now. The boyfriend cannot possibly mean that she ought to be there; rather, we should interpret the angry boyfriend’s remark as a complaint or as blaming the bride. A second counter reply might go along these lines: the fact that we say that the bride has an obligation to apologize for failing to show up at the wedding does not show that the bride no longer has an obligation to show up. Indeed, the objection goes, if it were not first true that she ought to go to her wedding, she would have nothing to apologize for (Sinnott-Armstrong,

1988). It is correct to say that the bride has an obligation to apologize for failing to show up at the wedding, but I argue that after noon she does not have a duty to show up at the wedding because she is in Paris. Surely she does have an obligation to apologize for the negative consequences of her blameworthy action. The objector may reply that this response is unavailable when there is no blame, for example, in the debtor's case. I agree that in a case of blameless inability, we still want to say that it is natural for the debtor to express regret at the situation, but it does not make much sense to say that he has an obligation to apologize, in the sense of admitting any wrongdoing. The final counter reply is a standard challenge to (OC). Opponents of (OC) complain, for example, that it would be senseless in the debtor's case to say that if the debtor has squandered his money, then he no longer ought to repay his loan (Stocker, 1987). (OC) would allow him to get released from undesired obligations, so the objection goes. However, saying that when he is robbed, at ten minutes to twelve, the debtor no longer has an obligation to repay the loan by noon does not entail that the debtor no longer has an obligation to repay his debts at all.

Another objection concerns the understanding of 'can' in (OC). As expressed in an earlier footnote (Ftnt. 6), 'can' is not to be interpreted in the sense of either logical, metaphysical, or physical capacities of the agent. And once again, the sense of capacity relevant here does not refer to the capacities of heroes and saints or to those agents under extreme conditions. The kind of can't that defeats ought is not given by what a select group of agents would do. Rather, the sort of can't that defeats ought is constrained by the psychological properties of those agents. As Griffin puts it:

“In short, we must live ordinary human lives; we must largely live as, anyway, we were going to live. A few people may turn out quite different

from this; a very few of them, the ones who salvage some sort of sanity, might even be capable of effective impartial concern for all. But what is in the accessible psychological repertoire of the minute exception may well not be in the repertoire of the vast majority of human beings. In any case, none of us would be willing to raise our children to be utterly impartial; we should want to raise them to be capable of love and affection for those around them—that is hard enough. We should not know how to produce someone emotionally detached to that extreme degree, yet sane. We are incapable of such fine-tuning. We should be too likely simply to produce an emotional wreck.” (1996: 91)

The skeptic may object that Griffin’s account is still too vague. We need to fill out the notion of what is within the agent’s psychological repertoire in order to evaluate whether the arguments for (OC) provide compelling reasons for accepting the principle. The skeptic might say that since an act is within her psychological repertoire if she has some motivation to act, and she is unable to Φ because she is simply not psychologically motivated to Φ , then it follows that she can in fact avoid blame for failing to Φ only because she is not psychologically motivated to Φ . In response, we should say first that an act’s being within the agent’s psychological repertoire does not equate to her being motivated to perform an act. And second, we should emphasize a reading of (OC) that is not primarily concerned with individual motivation. For I might be so deeply depressed as to be incapable of many ordinary actions (and, therefore, blameless in not doing what I ought to have done). But the focus here should be the large – though not universal – class of persons who have typical motivations. The members of this class of persons form deep attachments of love and friendship, they form commitments to groups and organizations, to projects and institutions.

And there is another problem, the skeptical might argue. The abiding appeal of (OC) consists, at least in part, of its promise to supply a natural constraint in normative theorizing, as explained at the beginning of this section. But understanding the sense of

capacity relevant to (OC) in terms of the sort of people that we should want there to be, the skeptic might argue, does not provide a natural constraint on normative theories because ‘can’ in (OC) becomes normatively charged. According to the objection, (OC) cannot be employed until the central component of the normative project is completed, in particular, until it can be established what kind of people we should want there to be. And then the problem of circularity appears. However, if ethics is in the first instance – as in Aristotle – about the good life for the individual, then I am ethical insofar as I have a good life, which turns out to be a life in which I enjoy being a good family member, a good friend, and a good citizen. We should want everyone to be like that. One ought to be altogether rational and social and to lead a good life. But we all fall short, and some of us are doomed almost from the beginning to fail. Consider the analogy of golf. We all know what would count as perfection in golf. But we all fall short; we all aim at perfection with almost every shot. The ideal of perfect golf does guide our shots, and each of us occasionally makes a perfect shot, just as each of us occasionally does something just right.

Our reading of (OC) can be supplied with a workable characterization of the class of agents we should want there to be, without making any claim about the ‘ought’. As Griffin proposes:

“The sort of people that we want there to be, the sort of people able to meet the demands that are likely to be made upon them in the course of their lives, will be deeply committed to certain other persons by ties of love and affection. They will also be committed to certain goals and institutions and not others; otherwise, society will work badly. But such committed persons will be incapable of complete impartiality, incapable of treating everybody for one and nobody for more than one, their own children as well as a total stranger. Again, it is not that no humans are capable of this extreme impartiality; some very unusual people have in fact been. But we should not want to be like those people ourselves; there

would be costs to a good life, both prudentially and morally, that would be far too great to pay. Nor should we dream of raising our children like that.” (Griffin, 2006: Ch. 5, p. 4)¹⁵

In sum, there seem to be enough grounds to justify (OC). As far as they go, the objections do not succeed. And so this confirms the claim that normative principles are (and should be) constrained by the capacities of a particular class of actual persons, namely, the “ones that we should want there to be.”

The last objection to the requirement of psychological realism – whether ‘can’ becomes normatively charged in the formula “the sort of people that we want there to be” – leads to a final objection, namely, that (OC) conflicts with an, arguably, defensible thesis, namely, the *fact/value* distinction or *is/ought* thesis.

1.3. THE AUTONOMY OF ETHICS AND THE ENTANGLEMENT THESIS

The final objection against the requirement of psychological realism holds that the principle is inconsistent with the *fact/value* distinction. If *ought* implies *can*, then the claim that someone ought to do something implies that the person is able to do the thing. Now, the kind of ‘can’t’ that defeats ‘ought’ is determined by the motivational capacities of a subclass of desirable agents. That is, the claim that someone can’t do something is a nonmoral claim. And the claim that an agent has – or does not have – a moral duty to do the thing is a moral claim. Then, if we accept that *ought* implies *can* and we accept that some can’t defeats ought, it follows that a nonmoral claim implies a moral claim.

However, according to the *is/ought* or *fact/value* thesis, we cannot derive a moral claim from a nonmoral claim. Hence, (OC) conflicts with the *fact/value* distinction (Frankena,

¹⁵ We believe that one ought to feel gratitude for a favor and be indignant at an injustice done to another person. Some people are incapable of the right sort of feeling, and Kant denies that one can have a feeling at will, and so denies that one has an obligation to have any given feeling. But we want there to be people who feel gratitude and indignation on appropriate occasions; hence we can say that one ought to.

1976; Gewirth, 1982; von Wright, 1963). The validity of this final objection relies primarily on whether there is a defensible version of the *is/ought* thesis.

For much of the twentieth century, philosophy and science went their separate ways. Moral philosophers variously inspired by Hume's injunction against inferring *ought* from *is* (1740) and Moore's Open Question Argument (1903) maintained that descriptive considerations of the sort offered in the natural and social sciences cannot constrain ethical reflection without vitiating its prescriptive nature (Stevenson, 1944; Hare, 1952). The *is/ought* distinction is attributed to Hume but the standard interpretation of the dichotomy might have surprised the Scottish philosopher, who appears to have drawn the opposite conclusion; namely, that ethics is either psychology or nothing. In any case, in the field of moral psychology, fears of the naturalistic fallacy kept moral philosophers from incorporating developments in biology and psychology. However, much recent work suggests that the wall between descriptive and normative research may not be as impermeable as the followers of Hume and Moore suppose (Railton, 1995; Putnam, 2002; Martin, 2006). Since the 1990s, many philosophers have drawn on recent advances in cognitive psychology, brain science, anthropology, behavioral economics, and evolutionary psychology to inform their work. This cooperative trend has been especially intense in moral philosophy. Answers to important ethical questions require and often presuppose answers to empirical questions, especially in the field of applied ethics and business ethics.

In this section, I shall first introduce the standard version of the *is/ought* distinction in philosophy and the social sciences.¹⁶ Second, I shall draw up the *status*

¹⁶ From now on, the expressions 'is/ought thesis' and 'fact/value dichotomy' will be used interchangeably to referring two claims, namely, (1) that no states of affairs in the world can be said to be values and

quaestio in business ethics research. Thereafter, I shall provide a number of objections that make the *is/ought* distinction untenable. From these premises, I shall conclude that the final objection against the requirement of psychological realism does not hold either.

1.3.1. Normativity and Description

Let us begin by considering how the empirical evidence in the social sciences may bear a strong *prima facie* relevance to normative theorizing. We shall carefully review these data in chapter four. For now, we can consider how a fair amount of experimental data on helping behavior apparently challenges standard philosophical accounts of altruism. For example, it is a matter of contention whether philosophical accounts of altruism can accommodate the results obtained by Darley and Batson in their Good Samaritans experiments. Darley and Batson recruited seminary students for a study on religious education. First they completed personality questionnaires about their religion and later they were told to go to another building to continue the experiment. On their way they encountered a confederate, a man slumped in an alleyway, who moaned and coughed twice as they walked by. Darley and Batson varied the amount of urgency they told the subjects before sending them to the other building, and the task they would perform when they arrived. One task was to prepare a talk about seminary jobs, the other about the story of the Good Samaritan. In one condition the subjects were told they were late for the next task, in the second, they were told they were right on time, and, in the third condition, they were told they had a few minutes but they should head on over anyway. The results were striking: overall 40% of the subjects offered some help to the

evaluative judgments are best understood not to be pure statements of fact, and (2) that ‘ought’ conclusions do not follow logically from ‘is’ statements.

victim. In low urgency situations, 63% helped, while in medium urgency 45% of the subjects helped. In the high urgency condition, only 10% of the subjects helped the confederate. Darley and Batson failed to find any correlation between “religious types” and helping behavior. Apparently, the degree of hurriedness induced in the subject had a major effect on helping behavior, but the task variable did not, even when the talk was about the Good Samaritan parable (Darley and Batson, 1973: 105).

The standard response to this evidence in philosophy stresses that the justification of helping behavior is independent of any view about the motivation and the explanation of it. The experimental data about the basis of benevolent behavior cannot refute philosophical accounts of benevolence – so the argument goes – because such accounts are not empirical theses about the basis of behavior. For example, in Kant, those actions from sympathy, even if good actions, have no true moral worth. Therefore, even if these empirical studies show that the motives we regard as morally good play no role in the explanation of helping behavior, the empirical data about what explains helping behavior are completely irrelevant to understanding what constitutes morally good helping behavior.

Similarly, in a seminal article on this topic, Thomas Nagel (1978) expressed that merely biological characteristics like race and sex cannot play a role in ethics because ethics is a theoretical inquiry endowed with its own standards of justification, in which criteria imported from other domains cannot be directly relevant. This is indeed the line philosophers draw to distinguish what is (and what is not) normative theory. Normative theories are about how people ought to act and how they ought to live. They are not claims about how people do act as a matter of fact. We are not (and we should not) be

surprised if people sometimes fail to do what they are required to do and fail to live in the way they should live. They may fail frequently; they may fail sporadically; they fail. But the *is/ought* distinction enters here: a (normative) statement about how people ought to behave should not be mistaken for a description of how people in fact behave. Hence, as the *is/ought* thesis goes, one cannot disprove any normative claim about what people ought to do merely by describing that they do not actually behave that way. Even if we found that all human beings have a disposition to lie, such a finding would not help much in establishing whether a prohibition to lie or intentionally deceive others can be morally justified. Admittedly, most philosophers would accept that descriptions of how people act are relevant to ethics, but in that sense all empirical claims may be relevant to defending ethical statements. Likewise, normative statements should not be confused with descriptions of the moral beliefs or ethical codes of some group. For it is one thing to describe how a given society thinks people should act and a different thing to say whether that is indeed the way people should morally act. There was a widespread belief among U.S. firms such as J.P. Morgan, Lehman Brothers, Aetna Inc., Bank of America, and other, that slavery was morally permissible in the American South. But such a belief should not grant any claim on the moral permissibility of slavery.

Social scientists are concerned with descriptions of what people and groups believe; philosophers are concerned with the justification of the right sets of beliefs. Normative questions, then, cannot be settled by an appeal to the work of psychologists, sociologists, economists and so on. And the mere fact that a given group makes a moral claim is not enough to prove – at least by that fact alone – that such a claim is morally justifiable. Finally, defending a moral claim – that is, providing reasons to establish how

people should act – is completely different from merely reporting the opinion of persons or groups about any matter. In sum, the standard philosophical position on the *is/ought* problem is that “the substantive moral claims of normative ethics should not be confused with descriptive claims about what people actually do, or about what various groups (or individuals) think people should do.” (Kagan, 1998: 9)

It is not surprising, then, how different it is to defend an ethical theory, as opposed to a scientific one. In choosing between scientific theories, scientists draw upon empirical evidence that is, by conducting experiments, testing predictions against observations, historical analysis, observation, interviews, surveys, and so on (Bacharach, 1989). None of these methods are available in normative research. What kind of experiments would we need to test whether whistleblowing is morally right or insider trading morally wrong? Observations cannot either grant or undermine a normative claim by themselves. Still, the empirical evidence is relevant in order to clarify the facts of the matter, for example in this case, the antecedents and consequences of whistleblowing and insider trading.

Scientists concur with the philosopher (Kitcher, 2001). And social scientists, inspired by the natural sciences model, see themselves as exclusively concerned with the description and explanation of social phenomena, focusing on facts and cause-and-effect relationships. They have maintained that only a value-free sociology, a value-free psychology and, a value-free economics, are defensible. Positive economics, for example, concerns exclusively the analysis of economic behavior in a way that avoids any economic value judgment (Samuelson, 1947). It is distinguished from “normative economics” (Keynes, 1891). In what is considered “the most influential work on

economic methodology of the twentieth century,” (Hausman, 2007) Friedman defended Keynes’s distinction of positive and normative economics, that is, between what is and what ought to be in economic matters. He argues that as a science, economics should be free from normative judgments in order to be respected as an objective field, “in precisely the same sense as any of the physical sciences” (1953: 4). Likewise, in the management literature, from the beginning Herbert Simon promoted logical positivism in management research as a requirement for the development of a respectable science of administration. Simon argued for a strong distinction of facts and values: the new field – a science of public administration – is concerned only with facts, as science is. Propositions based on facts, Simon argues, can be “tested to determine whether they are true or false – whether what they say about the world actually occurs or whether it does not.” (1957: 45)

Nowadays, the descriptive understanding of moral phenomena is becoming more prominent because of the work of psychologists who have been influenced by the views of Hume, who tried to present a naturalistic account of moral judgments (Haidt, 2006). Likewise, some comparative and evolutionary psychologists (Hauser, 1996; De Waal, 1996) take morality to be present among non-human animals, primarily other primates (but not limited to them), in this understanding of morality as any code of conduct that a person or group takes as most important.

1.3.2. Facts, Values, and Business Ethics

As it was explained in section one, debates in business ethics research reproduce the normative/empirical divide, which reflects at a deeper level the *is/ought* thesis. Whereas the functionalist paradigm has dominated organizational science, driven by the science model and characterized by an objectivist view, normative business ethics is

concerned with what ought to be, with the justification and assessment of behavior, where autonomy and responsibility are the assumptions on human agency. Normative theories in business ethics intend to prescribe behavior and they are more concerned with reflection on business practice and a rational critique of moral judgments in organizational contexts. In contrast, the empirical approach is intended to respond to the question of what is. It is descriptive. The empirical approach defines ethical behavior in an allegedly neutral way, meaning ethical choices and decisions, rather than conformity to certain moral standards. Social scientists are reluctant to adopt a strong assumption of free will and autonomy because they are committed to predict and explain human behavior in organizations. They tend to be determinist, in the sense that they believe human behavior is lawful and determined – completely or at least partially – by external factors and constrained by external barriers. Trevino and Weaver (1994) affirm that most social scientists would define themselves as interactionists, in the sense of reciprocal causation: the individual and the environment mutually influence each other (Bandura, 1986). There are, in this view, multiple determinants, internal and external to the individual. The study of external determinants is more interesting for businessmen and management scholars because they can exercise some control over them, as we will see in chapter four.

Social scientists focus on identifying definable and measurable factors of individual psychology and social factors to explain and predict organizational behavior with the ultimate purpose of providing the basis for managing individuals and organizations. The project involves a commitment to reduction that shall be discussed in depth in chapters two and three. Theory justification is accomplished by the model of

empirical confirmation and disconfirmation and through the ability of those theories to explain behavior and solve business problems. If the theories fail to provide managerial guidance, they are indeed useless for the management scholar (Trevino and Weaver, 1994: 124). Both the normative and the behavioral approach to business ethics research have developed their own vocabulary. While “ethical” is a normative term in philosophy, which normally connotes right or morally appropriate, it is merely a descriptive term in behavioral business ethics, meaning the behavior of an agent facing a decision that has any bearing on moral matters (where the definition of which matters are moral matters is an empirical question).

Those scholars in business ethics who accept the *is/ought* thesis as true, must supply a way of dealing with the relationship between the normative and the empirical inquiry in business ethics. Weaver and Trevino (1994) identify three conceptions on the possibility (and intensity) of unifying efforts, namely, parallelism, symbiosis, and full integration.

Parallel approaches to business ethics, according to Weaver and Trevino, assume that normative and empirical business ethics research have in common only a shared concern with certain behavior, but the basic concepts of one field are irrelevant from the standpoint of the other. For example, the empirical inquiry avoids value-laden concepts (e.g., democracy) and untestable evaluative judgments, which leads to “inter-paradigmatic incommensurability.” We can see this problem in approaches to research on punishment. While the descriptive research is concerned with its effectiveness, normative research is mostly focused on whether it is morally justifiable or appropriate. Of course a philosopher would reply that the very idea of worrying about effectiveness implies a

commitment to a normative conception of punishment. Weaver and Trevino conclude that mutual isolation is untenable.

A second conception consists of a symbiotic approach to business ethics research, defined as a sort of marriage of convenience. Philosophers may argue that whereas we should not conflate the methodological lines between normative and descriptive research, it would be mistaken for normative theorists to overlook the myriad ways in which normative theories rely on empirical claims; in the case of business ethics, on facts about individual and corporate behavior. For instance, Smith argues that “descriptive research in business ethics remains an important source of information for normative theorists to consider.” (2008: 3) Normative and descriptive research are then seen as two self-contained individuals who nevertheless engage in an ongoing relationship for mutual benefit. These approaches are quite demanding, because they require scholarly bilingualism; information from each type of inquiry is potentially relevant to the pursuit and application of the other form of inquiry. Symbiosis may be defended on the basis of the practical value of a collaborative relationship and the divergent nature of normative and descriptive business ethics. The most influential work on the extra-legal responsibilities of business corporations can be interpreted, I submit, as contributions to the symbiotic approach. The earlier work by Freeman and Gilbert on corporate strategy according to which “values explain action” (1988: 20), as well as Donaldson and Dunfee’s Integrative Social Contract Theory, which is offered as a theory that bridges the 'Is-Ought' Gap are examples of the symbiotic approach. In spite of the advantages of keeping intact the theoretical cores of normative and descriptive business ethics, Weaver

and Trevino suggest that the symbiotic approach is problematic because separation is difficult in practice (1994: 135).

The third and most ambitious alternative is full theoretical integration, which entails a form of hybridization, that is, creating a new breed of theory by blending the cores of two or more disciplines as in the work of Kohlberg, Giddens, and Etzioni. In business ethics, William Frederick (2004) has advocated such a conception integrating evolutionary biology, physics, cognitive neuroscience, and evolutionary psychology to understand the biogenetic determinants of business behavior. Weaver and Trevino list three varieties of hybridization. The first is called *conceptual importation*, and entails that empirical research implicitly assumes normative categorizations of moral phenomena. A second variety is called *theoretical reciprocity* and assumes the intentional interdependence of normative and empirical theories. In this view – exemplified by Kohlberg’s work on cognitive moral development (Kohlberg, 1984) – normative theory helps explain and not merely evaluate psychological processes. The third variety of integration is called *theoretical unity* and rejects the distinction between normative and descriptive research in business ethics for being methodologically untenable, given that there is no normatively neutral description of human activity and that social facts are inseparable from the interpretive stances of the actors who constitute society. Victor and Cullen’s typology of organizational ethical climate has been offered as an example of theoretical unity, in that it incorporates central concepts of normative theory and empirical analysis to develop a new theory. Full integration may be also problematic because of the temptation to reject normative principles when they fail to describe accurately, and because it conflicts with the self-identity of both disciplines.

Fifteen years ago in a special issue of *Business Ethics Quarterly* devoted to this topic, Weaver and Trevino (1994) predicted that the symbiotic inquiry would have the easiest future because it requires open-mindedness, bilingualism, and ongoing dialogue between both fields. Other influential business ethics scholars endorsed that view. Donaldson, for instance, argued that an integrated methodology that combines normative and descriptive elements would lead to “confusion, dilettantism, and, eventually, irrelevance” because at the level of fundamental theory we cannot both understand empirical causes and evaluate normative behavior using the same set of integrated axioms. So he denies that “the theories designed to help us know and understand facts, or make predictions, or understand causal connections, can be rolled logically into those that evaluate behavior.” (1994: 158)¹⁷ A quick review of the recent literature in business ethics and social issues in management suggests that these scholars were too optimistic. The parallel approach is still the dominant conception among business ethics scholars. But some of them notice the problem:

“Philosophers, at least a group of them, have come to the fence. It is time for our field to meet them and others, such as those in theology, who come from a normative tradition and likewise understand what they have to offer us in our pursuit to define ‘ethical behavior.’” (Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe, 2008: 586)

We have not been able to make significant contributions to the process of reconciliation but the acknowledgement of the problem may indicate some progress.

¹⁷ In the same vein, Werhane (1994) argues that just as social scientists cannot be purely objective, so, too, ethicists cannot be purely non-empirical and so she provides examples in which the descriptive/normative distinction is muddy, namely, the feminist notion of caring that affects descriptive studies of caring and the use of the statements about rights in right theories.

1.3.3. The Entanglement of Facts and Values

The three strategies – parallelism, symbiosis, and full integration – entail acceptance of the *is/ought* distinction. But there are still strong reasons to reject the *is/ought* thesis all together and, in that way, to resist the final objection against the requirement of psychological realism in business ethics research. In the following paragraphs, I shall follow Hilary Putnam's argument on the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy, and introduce a number of arguments in the fields of economics, management, and business ethics which challenge the *is/ought* distinction.

Putnam (2002) criticizes the arguments for the fact/value dichotomy by showing that both historically and conceptually, those arguments originated in an impoverished empiricist understanding of 'fact' and a misunderstanding of the nature of 'value,' because they ignore the way in which facts and values are deeply entangled. His argument was not innovative; Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1923) resisted the radical distinction between facts and values and anticipated the thesis of the entanglement of facts and values. Putnam recounts the history of the fact/value dichotomy – and the related analytic-synthetic dichotomy – which was foundational for classic empiricism as well as for its twentieth century offspring, *logical positivism*. According to Putnam, the notion of fact that underlies Hume's law – that an *ought* can never be derived from an *is* – was a narrow sense according to which a fact is something that corresponds to a sense-impression. Logical positivists were extremely influential in persuading social scientists of the validity and indispensability of sharply separating facts from values. The earliest logical positivist views of what a fact is were very close to Hume's views; logical positivism did not regard ethics as a possible subject of rational discussion whatsoever.

And the dichotomy as expressed by logical positivism was not based, Putnam argues, on any serious examination of the nature of values; indeed, what they examined was the nature of fact and they examined it in a narrow empiricist spirit. But logical positivists began to broaden their conception of factual statements in the early 1940s by holding that cognitively meaningful language could contain not only observational terms but also theoretical terms, terms referring to unobservables that are introduced by systems of postulates of the various scientific theories. Then, Putnam concludes that the whole argument for the classical fact/value dichotomy was in ruins and that logical empiricism was forced to accept that science must presuppose values, epistemic values. It was time to stop equating objectivity with description: many sorts of statements such as “correct,” “incorrect,” “true,” and “false,” are not just descriptions. Putnam defends the thesis of the deep entanglement of facts and values, which he exemplifies with our use of words such as “cruel.” The word “cruel” has clear normative and ethical connotations, in the sense that anytime we describe someone as “cruel” we are criticizing that person. Yet, the word “cruel” can be also used in a purely descriptive sense, as when the historian uses that word to describe Hitler, Ceausescu, or Pinochet. As Putnam puts it:

“Cruel simply ignores the supposed fact/value dichotomy and cheerfully allows itself to be used sometimes for a normative purpose and sometimes as a descriptive term (indeed, the same is true of the term “crime”). In the literature, such concepts are often referred to as “thick ethical concepts.” (2002: 35)

Thick ethical concepts are distinguished from *thin* concepts. The concepts ‘right’ and ‘ought’ are thin, non-world guided concepts (Geertz, 1973; Williams, 1985). A judgment involving thick concepts contains more empirical information than a judgment involving thin concepts. In addition, thick judgments entail a fusion of empirical content

and evaluation. Since they are abstract and general, thin concepts give little empirical information about the circumstances in which they are applied and do not by themselves provide motivating reasons for action.

The point is that it would be hard to identify the descriptive meaning of the word ‘cruel’ without resorting to the evaluative dimension, that is, “without using the word ‘cruel’ or a synonym.” (Putnam, 2002: 38) Thick ethical concepts such as “cruel,” “generous,” “elegant,” “strong,” “weak,” “vulgar,” and so on are counterexamples to the existence of an absolute fact/value distinction. And the picture of our language according to which nothing can be both a fact and value-laden is completely inadequate: an enormous amount of our descriptive vocabulary is indeed entangled and it must be so.

Of course Putnam’s thesis has not proceeded without objections. Indeed, the metaethical discussion between dichotomists – such as Mackie (1978) and Hare (1981) – and opponents of the dichotomy – such as Foot (1978), Murdoch (1970), McDowell (1998) and Wiggins (1998), besides Putnam – is one of the richest of the last decades. I cannot do justice to the debate in this introductory chapter. It will suffice to note at this point the two standard objections to the entanglement thesis, namely, that thick ethical concepts are plain factual concepts (as opposed to ethical concepts) and that they are factored into a purely descriptive components and an attitudinal component (wherein the descriptive component states the matter of fact and the imperative component is evaluative). It is not obvious how to go about this, though. With Murdoch and McDowell, Putnam argues that it is quite impossible to give both the descriptive meaning and to draw the distinction between terms like courageous behavior and behavior that is merely rash or foolhardy – a distinction we carefully review in chapters two and three. This is

because the very distinction depends on being able to acquire the evaluative point of view. The fact/value entanglement exemplifies a fundamental intertwining of the descriptive with the evaluative, a possibility traditionally overlooked by logical positivists.

Putnam illustrates how the fact/value dichotomy has penetrated social scientific theories by discussing the impoverishment of welfare economics in evaluating what it is supposed to evaluate, namely, economic well-being. And he discusses philosopher and economist Amartya Sen's work, which has enriched the evaluative capacity of welfare economics by means of the "capabilities approach." (Sen, 1987) The capabilities approach requires the use of the vocabulary we use to talk about capabilities as capacities for valuable functions. Such a vocabulary consists almost entirely of entangled concepts that cannot be factorable, as Hare suggested, into a descriptive and an attitudinal component. The language of the capabilities approach – from "well nourished" to "self-respect" – is invariably ethically colored. Valuation and the ascertaining of facts are, Putnam concludes, interdependent activities.

Prominent business ethicists have explored the implications of the entanglement thesis in business language. Freeman has famously argued against a widespread assumption among most business theorists, the *separation thesis*, which is formulated along these lines:

"The discourse of business and the discourse of ethics can be separated so that sentences like, "x is a business decision" have no moral content, and "x is a moral decision" has no business content." (1994: 412)

The separation thesis is, according to Freeman and other business ethics scholars, a fallacy that underlies much of the dominant story about business. It is reinforced by the

standard approach to research in business schools. Freeman rejects the Separation Fallacy by stressing that almost any business decision has some ethical content. And, like Putnam, Freeman believes that entangled concepts apply directly to actual practices in business.¹⁸ In order to reject the separation thesis we need an ethics that is capable of engaging the language and issues of business, that is, a theory whose basis is the Integration Thesis. According to this theory, most business decisions have some ethical content or an implicit ethical view, and conversely, most ethical decisions, or sentences about ethics have some business content or an implicit view about business.

A few management scholars such as Ghoshal (2005), Pfeffer (2005), Donaldson (2005) and Mintzberg (2004) have challenged the fact/value dichotomy and accused their colleagues of physics envy. Ghoshal, for example, argued that economics is taking over management and organization science, just as it has taken over political science, law, sociology, and psychology. He criticized agency theory and its effects on corporate governance and questioned why agency theory has so much currency in the face of disconfirming evidence. He argues that management research has created a false sense of knowledge which pervades business schools; we teach and act as if we have created complete, or near complete, causal theories about business. Theories, once accepted, set into motion processes that tend to ensure they become self-fulfilling (Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton, 2005). In addition, the assumptions of much of economic theory and the effects of these assumptions on people and institutions can be harmful (Ghoshal & Moran, 1996). As a result, teaching agency theory in business schools, for example, has created agency problems. Alternative approaches have not taken hold, according to Ghoshal, because

¹⁸ For instance, the arrangement by which a business firm provides employment to a person is seen as the provision of both economic and moral value, in way that presumably cannot be disentangled.

such an alternative theory “would not readily yield sharp, testable propositions, nor would it provide simple, reductionist prescriptions. . . we would have to fall back on the wisdom of common sense.” Surprisingly, Pfeffer (2005) concurs with Ghoshal in the need for organizational studies and business education to engage with values at least some of the time. It is good that we have arrived at the realization that business education courses are not value-free and that some values are better than others. Normative theories have the resources for creating social conditions, business organizations, and management practices that are more consistent with the values that are ethically defensible. Pfeffer (2005) accepts that we ought to be both more explicit and more thoughtful about the values we are imparting by what we teach and how we teach it.

Against Friedman, Samuelson, Jensen, and the like, economists have been more cautious in adopting the fact/value dichotomy. Friedrich von Hayek dedicated his Nobel lecture to the danger posed by scientific pretensions in the analysis of social phenomena. He maintains that “this failure of economists to guide public policy more successfully is clearly connected with their propensity to imitate as closely as possible the procedures of the brilliantly successful physical sciences.” (1989: 3-7) Given the nature of social phenomena, the application of scientific methods to such phenomena “are often the most unscientific, and, beyond this, in these fields there are definite limits to what we can expect science to achieve.” Similarly, Oxford philosopher and economist John Broome restored the old view that economics is a branch of ethics. Economists, Broome argues, have their eye on practical applications. Most of them are interested in economic science because they seek better ways of running the economy, structuring the economic system, or intervening in the economy. All of that practical part of economics is a branch of

ethics. However, he says, most economists do not like engaging in ethical theory. As he puts it:

“As you know, economists are self-effacing people, who don’t like to throw their weight about, and they hate the idea of imposing their ethical views on other people. So they sometimes pretend to themselves and other people that economics is an ethics-free zone... Microeconomists sometimes do it by saying they are concerned only with ‘economic efficiency’, which is supposed to be an ethically neutral notion... So, for example, no one could reasonably be opposed to liberalizing international trade, which makes the world economy more efficient. That’s the idea. But actually, there are always conflicts of interest. Some people are benefited by free international trade; others harmed. No practicable economic change is good for everyone; there are always some losers.” (2008: 8)

Furthermore, a number of philosophers have recently engaged in empirical investigations of the sort social scientists often conduct. Experimental philosophy is an emerging field of philosophical inquiry that makes use of empirical data in order to inform research on long-standing and unsettled philosophical questions. Appiah (2008) argues that experimental philosophy is not the innovative enterprise that it might seem; instead, it is a return to the very roots of philosophy, which has traditionally been closely informed by scientific work: the best philosophers have often engaged in science themselves. Appiah explores how the new empirical moral psychology – including experimental and cognitive psychologists, neuroscientists, evolutionary theorists, and behavioral economists – relates to the age-old project of philosophical ethics. Against those moral theorists who hold that the realm of morality must be autonomous from the sciences and that science undermines the authority of moral reasons, Appiah defends a sort of naturalism that provides a balanced account of the work being done in this field

and in which the relation between empirical research and morality should be seen in terms of dialogue rather than contest.¹⁹

Another path-breaking contribution integrating normative and behavioral research and so rejecting the is/ought distinction, which is at the core of this dissertation, is Mike Martin's work on morality and mental health. Martin (2006) is concerned with the question whether we are replacing morality with therapy or integrating morality and mental health. He argues that the line between character flaws and personality disorders has become fuzzy. Martin concludes that sound morality is indeed healthy, and that moral values are inevitably embedded in our conceptions of mental disorders and positive mental health. Contrary to the is/ought thesis, he shows how both morality and mental health are inextricably intertwined in our pursuit of a meaningful life. Martin describes the ways moral values are embedded in conceptions of mental disorders and positive health.²⁰

To conclude, the final objection to the requirement of psychological realism discussed in this chapter is that the (OC) principle is inconsistent with the is/ought thesis. The claim that an agent can not do something is a nonmoral claim, and hence, whether or not the agent has a moral obligation to do the thing cannot be derived from it. The validity of the objection lies on whether there is a defensible version of the is/ought

¹⁹ The four main areas of work in experimental philosophy at present are consciousness – what consciousness is and what conditions are necessary for conscious thought, cultural diversity – significant differences in a wide range of cognitive tasks between Westerners and East Asians, determinism and moral responsibility – whether or not a person can be morally responsible if their actions are entirely determined, and intentional action – asymmetries in our judgments of whether an agent intentionally performed an action.

²⁰ Martin (2006) argues that mental health and moral virtue are significantly interwoven in their meaning and reference when mental health is defined negatively, as the absence of mental disorders. And positive conceptions of health also invariably embody or presuppose moral values. Social scientific criteria for positive health – self-esteem, psychological integration, personal autonomy, self-actualization, social coping, and realistic cognition – are closely linked, respectively, to self-respect, integrity, moral autonomy, authenticity, responsibility, and truthfulness.

distinction. I submit that there is none, because of the entanglement of facts and values. Recent work in philosophy and the social sciences supports my thesis. Thus, it follows that the objection does not hold.

1.4. PROLEGOMENA TO A THEORY OF VIRTUE IN ORGANIZATIONS

So far I have defended the state of the art in normative research in business ethics and articulated the requirement of psychological realism in normative theorizing. It is time now to sketch the kind of normative theory that I shall develop here and examine whether such a theory can meet the requirement of psychological realism. As suggested by the title – “Taking character seriously” – in this dissertation I intend to contribute to the development of a theory that treats judgments of character as the basic judgments in business ethics and in which the basic ethical questions are grasped via the notion of the virtuous person.

Consider the story of Paul Rusesabagina. He was a Rwandan hotel manager working as the acting manager for the luxurious Hotel des Milles Collines and the Diplomate Hotel in Kigali.²¹ On April 6, 1994, a 100-day run of terror and genocide took over the already divided nation of Rwanda. The Hutus and the Tutsis, the two ethnic local groups, had long been at odds with one another. In spite of the efforts of the United Nations to control the fighting, the Hutu extremists continued their battles with the Tutsis. When the peacekeepers began to be among those attacked, they withdrew most of their troops, thereby leaving the battles to rage on. One early April day in 1994, Hutu militants rounded up Rusesabagina, his family, and other Tutsis, and put them on a bus. One guard handed Rusesabagina a gun and told him to shoot all the Tutsis on the bus.

²¹ Hagler, T. “Rescued by an African Schindler,” Sunday Times (London), February 6, 2005 (Weekend Review: 7) (retrieved from www.lexisnexis.com)

Even if it would be to save his own life, killing those innocents on the bus was unacceptable to Rusesabagina. So he found a way to save the people on the bus. He offered the guards money if they would take him and the others to the Diplomate Hotel. The guards accepted the offer and drove the bus to the hotel. Rusesabagina took money from the hotel safe to give to the guards. They left, and Rusesabagina took over driving the van and reaching the relative safety of the Hotel des Milles Collines. That day was the start of a daily routine of placating and bribing the guards in order to stave off killings in his hotel. As a result of Rusesabagina's influence and connections he took in 1268 refugees into the hotel in order to save them from being slaughtered by the Interahamwe militia. While at the end of the 100 days nearly a million people were murdered, the refugees under Rusesabagina's protection were unharmed. Journalist Philip Gourevitch reports that Rusesabagina "didn't seem to think that he could be called righteous, except when measured against the criminality of others, and he rejected that scale." (1998: 141)

Compare with Father Wenceslas Munyeshyaka, who was alleged to be complicit in the slaughter of Tutsi refugees who sought shelter and protection in the Holy Family parish in Kigali where Munyeshyaka was parish priest at the time. Witnesses gave account in precise detail of the massive executions which allegedly took place in the church on the 17th and 22nd of April, 1994. Munyeshyaka was alleged to have repeatedly participated in the selection of Tutsi refugees to be murdered, to have left them to die of thirst, to have reported to the authorities those who tried to help them, and to have coerced refugee girls to have sex with him. When in 1995 he was asked by two interviewers whether he regretted his actions during the genocide, Munyeshyaka

responded: “I didn’t have a choice.... It was necessary to appear pro-militia. If I had had a different attitude, we would have all disappeared.” (Gourevitch, 1998: 136)

Rusesabagina has been internationally honored and his story was dramatized in the well-known film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004). Munyeshyaka was sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment by a Rwandan military court in November, 2006. He was arrested by French authorities in 2007 and in February of 2008, the French authorities agreed to try Munyeshkaya in France.²²

By the time Rusesabagina was sheltering Tutsis refugees and Munyeshyaka was collaborating with the genocide, the Malden Mills factory was burning in Massachusetts. Malden Mills Industries is the original manufacturer of Polartec polar fleece and is located in Lawrence, MA. On December 11, 1995 the factory burned down. CEO Aaron Feuerstein decided to use his insurance money to rebuild it and also to pay the salaries of all the then-unemployed workers while it was being rebuilt. Feuerstein spent millions keeping all 3,000 employees on the payroll with full benefits for six months. His treatment of his employees received national recognition, especially at a time when most companies were downsizing and moving overseas. An article in *Fortune* stressed that he was both praised and ridiculed for keeping his employees. “But now he’s proving that treating workers well is just plan business.”²³ Feuerstein, an Orthodox Jew, declared that the reasons for his behavior did not have much to do with the business case for treating

²² Rwandan president Paul Kagame has disputed the facts and the motivations of Rusesabagina’s story. He suggested in 2006 that Rusesabagina should “not climb on the falsehood of being a hero, because it’s totally false,” and Francois Ngarambe, the president of the umbrella body of genocide survivors’ associations, said that Rusesabagina, “has hijacked heroism” and is trading with the genocide. In 2008, a public relations advisor to Kagame published the book *Hotel Rwanda or the Tutsi Genocide as seen by Hollywood*, which provides an alternative take to the portrayal of Rusesabagina’s actions in *Hotel Rwanda*. See Cowan, J. “Movie sparks public feud; Hotel manager, President disagree on who is the hero,” National Post (Canada), April 26, 2008 Saturday Edition p. A23 (retrieved from www.lexisnexis.com)

²³ Teal, T., “Not a Fool, Not a Saint,” *Fortune* 134.9, November 11, 1996,: 201-4.

his employees well. He said that he could have taken no other course of action due to his study of the Talmud, which indicated his responsibilities to the worker and the community.

1.4.1. Virtue Theories, Virtue Ethics

Any controversy over the motivations underlying the behavior of Rusesabagina, Munyeshyaka, and Feuerstein is mostly irrelevant for some business ethics (and psychological) theories. But they are fundamental according to the kind of normative theory I attempt to develop in this dissertation, which treats character as the primary evaluative focal point. Such a theory will provide the resources to describe and evaluate Rusesabagina, Munyeshyaka, and Feuerstein as agents as well as their behavior. The theoretical structure of such a theory, then, shall go along the lines of virtue ethics, which has a well-deserved place as one of three main theories in contemporary moral philosophy.

Virtue ethics was first stated by Aristotle, although it is not peculiarly Aristotelian since it underlies all of ancient ethical theory (Annas, 1993). It has been revived following the article by G.E.M. Anscombe criticizing modern ethics and advocating a return to the virtues. The growing attraction of virtue ethics as a serious rival of traditional moral theories is due to an increasing dissatisfaction with some central features of those traditional theories.

Modern virtue ethicists claim Aristotle as an ancestor, though he was himself working through an agenda laid down by Plato and Socrates, in response to the question at the heart of Greek ethics: "How should one live?" The ancient philosophical task was to show how living virtuously would be best for the virtuous person. Aristotle aimed to

show that human *eudaimonia* consists in the exercise, and not the mere possession of the virtues. The key component of his case is the argument that human nature is perfected through virtue. Much of the Nicomachean Ethics is taken up with portraits of the virtuous man intended to attract one to a life such as his. For Aristotle, all of the practical virtues will be possessed by the truly virtuous person, the man of practical wisdom.

Western philosophers' ideas about morality began to change in the 18th century. With the Enlightenment, philosophers began to search for groundings for moral judgment that did not depend upon specific metaphysical beliefs or group identities.²⁴ As a result, two main alternatives emerged that are of continuing relevance today, deontological and consequentialist theories. Deontological theories of ethics – including Kantian theory and also most varieties of contractualist theory, from Rawls (1971) and Scanlon (1998) to Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau – define moral judgments by reference to their logical form, as maxims or prescriptive judgments, rather than by their content, such that the moral status of an action is judged by reference to the kind of norm that underlies it.²⁵ In contrast, consequentialist theories, especially utilitarianism, attempt to ground moral judgment in pre-moral assessments of the consequences of actions; that is, the right thing to do is defined, fundamentally, with reference to what will have the best consequences -- however this clause is understood.

Virtue ethics has undergone a resurgence since the publication of G.E.M. Anscombe's article in 1958. In it, she denounces the mistake of seeking a foundation for morality grounded in legalistic notions such as obligation or duty in the context of a

²⁴ What MacIntyre (1981) called "the Enlightenment project" was an attempt to ground morality in highly abstract, even logical truths, and to disengage it from religious belief.

²⁵ Like Kantian theory, contractualism attempts to ground moral judgments by positing hypothetical contract-like relationships between agents. They are more attentive to the realities of human nature and social and political arrangements but they attempt to ground morality in formal, contractual, relations.

general disbelief in the existence of a divine lawgiver as the source of such obligation. In the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Anscombe recommends that philosophy of psychology should take the place of moral philosophy, until adequate accounts of such central notions as action and intention are available. She counsels philosophers to return to moral philosophy through an ethics of virtue.

Since then, virtue ethics has been characterized as the main rival of both deontological and consequentialist normative theories. Almost all modern versions of virtue ethics still show that their roots are in ancient Greek philosophy by the employment of the three fundamental concepts derived from traditional virtue ethics, namely, *arête* (excellence or virtue) *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom) and *eudaimonia* (usually translated as happiness or flourishing.)

Virtue ethics intends to respond to the question of what people should be like and what traits of characters are best for the sake of human flourishing. Virtue ethics has attracted the interest of moral philosophers, business ethicists, and social scientists in recent decades. Varieties of virtue ethical theories have been proposed as a distinctive approach to the major questions of ethics and as a third major position alongside Utilitarian and Kantian ethics. Consequentialist and deontological theories are exclusively based on the individual, while virtue ethics is based on affiliation and care. And whereas consequentialism and deontology represent a historically detached view, virtue ethics is rooted in the particularities of real historical communities.

This characterization of virtue ethics as a third major position has received much criticism. Hurka, for example, argues that recent writings have wrongly assumed that the importance of virtue cannot be captured in a consequentialist or deontological

framework. He claims that “it is not true that virtue cannot be properly understood within a traditional moral structure; it can. And it can be better understood there than if virtue is somehow made the centre of moral thought.” (2001: 255) Likewise, Nussbaum (1999) has objected that virtue ethics cannot be an alternative to the Utilitarian and Kantian traditions because there was already a tradition of concern with the virtues in both Consequentialism and Kantian theory, such that a talk of the virtues cannot be the characteristic note of virtue ethics.

What does make the difference, I shall defend in chapter two, is the role of character in ethical theorizing. Both consequentialism and deontology have integrated the virtues in terms of their traditional framework. As a result, experts distinguish “virtue ethics” – seen as the third approach – from “virtue theory,” which designates an alternative account of virtue within one of the other two mainstream approaches. Interest in Kant’s virtue theory has redirected philosophers’ attention to Kant’s long neglected Doctrine of Virtue. And utilitarians are developing consequentialist virtue theories, known as *virtue consequentialism* (Hooker 2000, Driver 2001).

The distinction between virtue ethics and virtue theory makes sense as a reference to the primacy of character in moral theory. The features that make virtue ethics unique, ultimately the reasons for the very language of virtue, are its concern for the role of motives and passions in good choice, its focus on character, and its emphasis in the whole course of the person’s life. Virtue ethics is a theory concerned with the agent (as opposed to moral theories that emphasize choice and action); concerned with the inner moral life

(as opposed to just rational choices); and focused on the whole course of the agent's moral life, and its patterns of commitment, passion, and behavior.²⁶

As an agent-based theory, virtue ethicists have serious reservations about principles and rules as comprehensive guides to practice. There are exceptions; sometimes a prescription is not the right thing. Yet that is not essential to any virtue ethical theory. Certain moral principles may be correct, but such an acknowledgment does not entail that virtues can be reducible to principles. They should not. The claim that there are correct principles is entirely consistent, I submit, with the claim that principles and rules may not always be adequate guides to action.

Unlike deontological versions of virtue theory, virtue ethics favors an alliance between normative concepts and a fine-tuned judgment of the particular circumstances, and it advocates a larger place for passions and sentiments in moral theory. In contrast to virtue consequentialism, virtue ethics emphasizes the plurality of value, the possibility of social cultivation of passions, and the enlargement of the role of reason in ethics. For those reasons, virtue ethics constitutes a more attractive approach to business ethics research than competing virtue theories, in that it offers a realistic account of our ethical life. We shall turn now to articulating the main theses of a theory of virtue.

1.4.2. Ten Fundamental Virtue Ethical Claims

I intend to lay out the basic features of *any* character-based moral theory in general, with special emphasis on the realm of business ethics. Admittedly, the list is

²⁶ Hence, virtue ethical theories rely on the assumption that we cannot evaluate the state of character of an agent merely on the basis of her behavior; we need to know a lot about the agent's moral life, inside and outside the context of her choice. At the immediate context, virtue ethics is concerned with the motives and intentions of the agent, with the quality of her deliberation and reflection, and with her reactive emotions. At the outside context, virtue ethics is interested in how the choice fits the patterns of response that this person has cultivated and in the pattern of consistency between her ends and motives.

incomplete. The ten claims examined here are the fundamental virtue ethical theses; they are not stipulations. I shall argue for them in due course. But I shall not be able to carefully discuss here either the objections leveled against virtue ethics or the strategies virtue ethicists use to meet those objections. We shall revisit these issues again and again in the next five chapters. My project in this section is primarily declarative, delineating the central elements a character-based moral theory must have.

- i. *Agent-based theory*: Ethical theory offers two main alternatives, an action-based or principle-based ethics – which refers to deontological and consequentialist theories – and an agent-based theory – some version of a virtue ethical theory. Despite their differences – and they are great – deontological and consequentialist ethical theories share three essential characteristics that are all denied by virtue ethics, namely, that all human beings are bound by some universal duties (which are prior or derivative from some notion of the good), that moral reasoning is a matter of applying principles and rules, and that the value of virtue is derivative from the notion of the right or the good.
- ii. *Two dimensions of Virtue*: Practical reasoning has a central role in an ethics of virtue. A virtue is an internal state. A virtuous person has a character of a certain sort. A virtue is not a habit in the sense in which habits can be mindless sources of actions in the agent that bypass her practical reasoning (See chapter two). A virtue, unlike a mere habit, is a tendency to do the right thing, for the right reason, in the appropriate way. It involves two dimensions, namely, the affective and the intellectual. The former involves feelings and reactions, appropriate (no contrary) inclinations, values and desires. The virtuous agent

does the right thing undividedly, for the right reason, because he understands that it is the right thing to do. Expertise in ethics can be seen when the agent's responses are sensitive to the particularity of situations. Aristotle explains that the agent develops these inclinations when starting his moral education, by learning from others to make particular judgments and by adopting some people as role models. In due course, the pupil starts thinking for himself and makes his judgment and practices coherent. The development of ethical understanding leads the agent to develop a disposition in the same way we acquire a practical skill or expertise. Character development therefore begins by following rules or role models in the agent's social and cultural context, but it requires that the agent develop a tendency to decide and act that involves the kind of understanding that the agent can achieve in his own case.

- iii. *Virtues and flourishing*: Even though most versions of virtue ethics insist on the conceptual link between virtue and eudaimonia, these are matters of dispute. For Aristotle, virtue is necessary but not sufficient, since external goods are needed and they are a matter of luck. For Plato as well as the Stoics, it is both necessary and sufficient (Annas 1993). For modern versions of virtue ethics there is disagreement. There are three distinguishable views about what makes a character trait a virtue. First, *eudaimonism*, which holds that the good life is the *eudaimon* life and the virtues are what enable a human being to be *eudaimon*. Virtues here are just those traits that benefit their possessor by excluding bad luck. So there is a link between eudaimonia and what confers virtue status on a character trait. The second view is *pluralism*, which rejects such a tight link

between virtue and eudaimonia. The good life is the morally meritorious life, that is, one that is responsive to the demands of the world; it is thereby the virtuous life because the virtues are those character traits that make their possessor responsive (Swanton 2003). The third view is *perfectionism* (also known as ‘naturalism’), according to which the good life is the life characteristically lived by someone who is good qua human being. The virtues enable their possessor to live such a life because the virtues are those character traits that make their possessor an excellent human being.

- iv. *Moral agency and motivation:* Virtue ethicists have endeavored to replace the traditional conception of moral agency with a virtue-centered ideal which allows agents to be moved directly by emotional concern for others (as opposed to a sense of duty or a cost-benefit calculation.) Without any motivation to do so there is no reason to maximize utility or respect the moral law. A morality of duty does not pay enough attention to the inner life, in the sense that the dutiful agent is not doing or feeling enough. Aristotelian virtue ethics gives reason an ambitious role, far more ambitious in some salient respects, than its role in Kantian moral philosophy. For reason sets not only ultimate ends and practical choices but also is responsible for forming the motivational and passional character. If the agent does the right thing with reluctance, or performs her duty with little sympathy, Kant will not think the less of her, so long as she was using every means in her power to do the right. Whereas Kantian ethics accepts that some things just cannot be helped and so it is inclined to be merciful to the deficiencies of the passional personality, virtue ethics is less tolerant. Aristotle

asks the agent to bring every motive, every wish, every passion in line with reason's commitments to ends. (Nussbaum, 1999: 178) The charge against deontology and consequentialism is not only that they fail to provide plausible justifying reasons for action, but that the motivational structure of what is moral agency is different from what the theories lead us to expect. Virtue ethicists hold that moral agency consists – at least partly – in acting and feeling in ways prompted by bonds of partiality, which require no further backing from impersonal ethical theory.²⁷

- v. *Virtue and practical reason*: One of the objections to virtue ethics is that it does not provide action-guiding principles, as opposed to utilitarianism and Kantianism which have been developed as ethics of rules to resolve moral dilemmas. Virtue ethicists since Aristotle maintain that rules will always run out in hard cases, but some sensitivity is required on the part of the judge in filling the gap between rules and the real world. In Aristotle, the virtuous man possesses *phronesis* (practical wisdom), a sort of a sensitivity to the morally salient features of particular situations which goes beyond an ability to apply explicit rules (*NE*, 1114b1; 1140b21). McDowell argues that we cannot postulate a world as seen by both the virtuous and the vicious, and then explain the moral agency of the virtuous through their possessing some special desire.

²⁷ As opposed to deontological and consequentialist theories which are primarily concerned with impersonality and impartiality independently from the desires of agents, virtue ethics is concerned with the integrity of the agent. Foot (1978), for example, argues that moral reasons depend on the desires of the agent. It follows then that a person who consistently behaves cowardly may be described as coward, but not necessarily as having any reason to act cowardly, unless they have a desire which would thereby be fulfilled.

Since moral rules run out, any object of desire could not be made explicit.²⁸

McDowell suggests that immorality is not necessarily irrational, since moral reasons depend on the agent's desires. The vicious person does not lack any capacity of the theoretical intellect, she lacks moral sensitivity.

- vi. *The primacy of aretaic judgments*: Virtue ethics is committed to the view that basic judgments in ethics are judgments about character; they take priority over the rightness or wrongness of actions (Slote, 1992). This basic assumption embodies two main theses: first, that at least some judgments about the value of character traits are independent of judgments about the rightness or wrongness of actions; and second, that the notion of virtue justifies the notion of right conduct in a sense that is explanatory prior to the notion of right conduct (Trianosky, 1986). Both theses run against the standard view on the relationship between rightness and virtue, which holds that the value of character traits depends on the value of the conduct that these traits tend to produce and that the concept of right behavior is theoretically prior to the concept of virtue. As we have just seen, the justification of the virtues lies in their essential role in human flourishing. Virtues are deemed as necessary (and even sufficient in some accounts, see iii) and as constitutive elements of human flourishing and well being. The terms *flourishing* and *well being* mean in this context a moralized, or “value-laden” concept of happiness, the sort of happiness worth seeking or having. Flourishing is precisely the primary concept in ethics, from which we should derive the virtues and then proceed to infer the

²⁸ This is important for moral education. For it should consist in enabling the person to develop sensitivities, not (at least not only) in inculcating rigid and absolute principles.

criteria of rightness about actions. As a corollary, a central claim to any form of virtue ethics is its account of rightness. An action is obligatory, virtue ethicists believe, if and only if it is what an agent with a virtuous character would do in the circumstances. And an action is wrong if and only if it is an action that an agent with a virtuous character would not perform in the circumstances. What makes the action right is that it is what a person of good character would do under the circumstances (Foot, 1978). Different versions of virtue ethics disagree in how far we should take this claim. A moderate version holds that judgments about character are independent from judgments about act and at least some judgments about acts are independent from judgments about character (Slote, 1993; Foot, 1978). Under this view, there are two parts of the theory which are irreducible to each other, one dealing with the morality of character and the other with judgments of acts. In contrast, a radical version denies that judgments of acts can be independent from judgments of character (Solomon, 1988). And within the radical view, a number of virtue ethicists maintain that we should eliminate the very notions of rightness, wrongness, and obligatoriness of acts because such concepts are just unintelligible (Anscombe, 1958; MacIntyre, 1981).²⁹

²⁹ The most stringent critique of modern moral philosophy in virtue theory is provided by MacIntyre, who grounds moral rationality in traditions. He claims that present moral discussion is nonsense because we unreflectively use a mix of concepts left over from moribund traditions, which are incommensurable. MacIntyre (1981) combines an Aristotelian emphasis on the virtues with a modern skepticism about the possibility of an objective theory of the good. Likewise, MacIntyre's stress on the importance of context is quite Aristotelian, but his relativism is not at all (see chapter five). MacIntyre claims that goods are internal to practices, and not assessable from some external point of view, while Aristotle believed that teleological reflection on universal human nature enabled one to identify those practices which are good. This relativism of modern virtue ethics has emerged also in political theory in the debate between communitarians and liberals. MacIntyre has defended preferences for the local and particular to the universal, the specific to the general, the embedded to the abstracted, the communal to the individual, the

- vii. *Virtue, virtuous action and continence*: A utilitarian may advocate acting virtuously for reasons of utility. A Kantian, on the other hand, might claim that my reason for acting virtuously is that to do so would be in accordance with the categorical imperative. Neither of these are the reasons virtue ethicists countenance. The properties of actions that according to virtue ethics constitute our reason for doing them are the properties of kindness, courage, honesty, justice, and so on. There is, then, a difference between acting from virtue and performing a virtuous action. The agent's performing a virtuous action may be seen as carrying out the action a virtuous person would do under those circumstances, although one may not oneself be a virtuous person. Virtue ethics, then, is concerned not only with the assessment of isolated actions but also with the state of character of the agent, during her whole life. There are reasons for doing certain things, such as honest things, and also for being a certain type of person, such as an honest person.
- viii. *Responsibility for character*: Agency, and thereby moral responsibility, extends to how we are morally constituted and not just to what we do. There are substantial respects in which character is voluntary. Agents can be praised/blamed for their good/bad traits as well as for their good/bad acts. A trait is an apt candidate for praise or blame insofar as it is voluntary, namely, as the trait has its origin in the agent. Agents can be responsible for having produced bad character traits, for retaining bad character traits, and/or for taking on bad character traits. Responsibility for actual behavior always traces to at

inexplicit to the explicit, the traditional to the revised, and the partial to the impartial. Although it is an important version of virtue ethics, MacIntyre's theory does not represent the core of the contemporary virtue ethical thought, at least regarding its nostalgic (and utopian) conservatism.

least one act and presupposes the agent's control over her behavior. By being capable of affecting her traits, her responsibility extends to her character.

The first eight claims are indeed generic claims, which summarize the main features of a theory of virtue. The last two theses pertain to the field of business ethics. Studies on virtue and character in business ethics stem from the seminal work of Robert Solomon (1993), who brought Aristotelian theory to business ethics research and bridged the gap between ethical theory and business practice. Hartman (1996) integrates Aristotelian virtue ethics and Rawlsian contractualism to building morally good organizations. Koehn (1995) has discussed a number of problems with the moral psychology that underlies Aristotelian business ethics. Moberg (1999) has explored the connections between virtue ethics and personality psychology in business practices and opened the door to empirical research on virtue ethics in business ethics. More recently, Moore (2002, 2005, and 2008) has made a contribution applying the work of Alasdair MacIntyre to business ethics and adopting MacIntyre's notions of practice and institution to shed light on our understanding of modern business corporations. And Robert Audi (2008) has joined the business ethics community and contributed a number of articles on virtue ethics in theory and practice, especially in business ethics theory.

The last two theses refer to the level of analysis of virtue ethics in business ethics. And they are especially grounded in business ethics, because some authors have attempted to distance themselves from familiar features of theories defended as virtue ethical theories – such as in the work of MacIntyre and Taylor – that are mostly atheoretical and dangerously nostalgic for tradition and community (Solomon, 1993).

- ix. *Virtue, corporations, and communities*: The Aristotelian approach to business ethics begins with the concept of the individual embedded in the community, as opposed to individuals existing in isolation. Human beings are social creatures by nature; hence virtues are community-related. A virtuous person is a good family member, a good friend, and a good citizen. And the primary needs of families, friends, and communities help determine which traits are virtues. Virtues are excellences specific to particular institutions, activities, and practices. That is to say that the virtue of a virtue depends on the social context. And the concept of virtue provides a conceptual linkage between the individual and his society. As Solomon puts it, “a virtue is a pervasive trait of character that allows one to fit into a particular society and to excel in it.” (Solomon, 1993: 107) The community also has a central place in a theory of virtue for it provides the social and political context for the development of the agent’s character. Therefore, if a good community is a necessary condition of the good life, it follows that it is important to establish what a good community is (Hartman, 1996). Virtue ethicists anticipate that personal virtue does not thrive in a bad community. Furthermore, an organization resembles a community, and so a virtuous organization requires the support of a virtuous community. Ultimately, business ethics may be about creating the right kind of community (Hartman, 1996).
- x. *Micro business ethics*: Aristotelian business ethics should be primarily concerned with the personal dimension of business, that is, the concepts and values that define individual responsibility and role behavior, as opposed to the

macro approach, already established in business ethics (Solomon, 1993). *Macro business ethics* refers to the principles which govern or should govern the system and focuses on issues of business and public policy, in which business ethics becomes the domain of the philosophy of economics and social and political philosophy. Macro business ethics is not centrally relevant to most of the problems faced by real decision makers in business. And it is unintelligible for those who seek guidance in business ethics theory. The *micro* approach to business ethics advocated by virtue ethical theories has practical application because it is concerned with the psychological processes of decision making and the environmental conditions under which individuals develop their character traits, make and implement decisions, take responsibility for those decisions, and attempt to lead good lives. Business ethics theory is description and contemplation of individuals within and outside of business roles, as well as the role of business in society. As Solomon puts it, “While I will always hold that the existential unit of responsibility and concern is and remains the individual, the individual in today’s business world does not operate in a social vacuum. He or she is more likely than not an employee – whether in the stockroom or as chief financial officer – and our basic unit of understanding has to be the company, or rather, the employee in a company.” (1993: 111)

1.4.3. On the Virtues

I have sketched a rough outline of the theory of virtue to whose development I aim to contribute. A clarification about the scope of this dissertation is in order. Any comprehensive theory of virtue should provide a full account of which character traits are

virtues (and which are vices) and explain what these virtues (and vices) consist in. That is beyond the scope of this project. Contemporary accounts of the virtues typically start from Aristotle, but his grounding of the virtues in human nature and the question of the unity of virtue are both disputable claims that I shall not be able to address here. Neither will I be able to discuss the historical variability of what have been counted as virtues both in general and in business ethics research. Yet, I shall briefly review the key points that are relevant to my discussion before proceeding with the concluding section of this chapter.

First, the content of the virtues. The historical dimension of the virtues is often absent in many virtue ethical accounts. It is contended that the account of the virtues we give nowadays may be in several respects different from the Ancient account. A common target is the place Aristotle gives to *megalopsuchia* (translated as “greatness of soul”), which represents an attitude to one’s own worth that is more Greek than universal (Nussbaum, 1999). The same has been said about the virtue of truth in Aristotle, which is narrowed to boasting and modesty. And the Aristotelian virtue of justice is defined to an important extent in political terms, so giving a fairly restricted account of fairness as a personal characteristic. If we are asked for the principal virtues, we might well identify kindness, which is not an Aristotelian virtue at all. The historical variation, both in philosophical formulations and in cultural realizations of the virtues, raises wider issues of how theories of the virtues should be understood. The conceptions of human nature that underlie such theories are open to wide reinterpretation in the face of changing values. Hence, the presupposition that an understanding of human nature could yield a determinate account of the virtues appears problematic. There are of course factors in the

psychology and circumstances of human beings that do not change, and so make certain virtues omnipresent. It appears that in any society people need courage, self-control, and some version of prudence. But the project of developing a substantive universal virtue theory may need something more than courage, self-control, and prudence to determine the content of such a theory. If it is uncontroversial, as a historical fact, that the virtues that have been recognized at different times and by different cultures vary considerably, then there may be a problem for the virtue ethicist. Moreover, it is alleged that special virtues are required in the world of business as well as other spheres of social life. A distinction between the content and the level of specification of the virtues is necessary, as will be discussed in chapter five.

A second problem is the conceptualization of vices. Ancient virtue ethics named a variety of vices and characterized each of them by the absence of the restraining or shaping influence of virtue, together with the operation of some natural self-centered motive. For example, cowardice was the disposition to give in to fear given the absence of courage; irascibility the disposition to give in to anger. It is not that the motivation behind these actions was a distinctively bad motive (Taylor, 2006). Rather, natural motives are expressed in the vicious agent in ways they would not be expressed by a virtuous person. But there are other failings in which the agent's motivation is distinctively deplorable, constituted by the perversion of a virtue. Consider the case of justice. At the level of actions there might be no distinctive motives to injustice. A person can act unjustly from a variety of motives. Then, an unjust person might be understood not really as someone with some characteristic motive, but rather as someone who is insensitive to considerations of justice (though that could be seen as a distinctive motive

for injustice). Another kind of deficiency is a lack of perception of others (Adams, 2006). From the teleological conception of virtue as the fulfillment of the highest human capacities – as explained in (iii) above – we must conclude that vices are failings, instances of a shortage, which does not leave enough room for a notion of the vicious and even for evil motivations, such as cruelty (i.e., the desire to cause suffering to others from which agents derive pleasure). The intricate link between virtues, vices, and more radical forms of viciousness, such as evil motives, will be explored in chapter four, when assessing the empirical evidence in social psychology against the existence of character traits.

The third issue that requires attention is the discussion of specific virtues and vices in organizational life, especially in business. “The virtues” is a short-hand expression to summarize the ideas that define good character. Listing all the virtues is an intimidating task, which is outside the scope of this project. Virtue ethicists have frequently attempted to provide taxonomies and rankings of the virtues. Aristotle himself thought that his survey of virtues from chapter 6 of Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics* would accomplish the task of determining how many excellences of character there are. Along the lines of developing a catalogue of excellences, there is, first, a well known thesis – traced back to Plato and Aristotle – according to which there are four virtues, the *cardinal virtues*, on which the moral life and all other virtues hinge: prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. A number of contemporary virtue ethicists have engaged in similar projects. Pincoffs (1986) provides a complex categorization of virtues into instrumental and non-instrumental ones. McGinn (1992) lists kindness, honesty, justice, and independence as the four main virtues. And although they are engaged in a

completely different enterprise, social scientists have also developed their own catalogues of virtues. For example, positive psychologists Peterson and Seligman (2004) identify six “core virtues,” made up of twenty-four measurable character strengths, which are considered good by the vast majority of cultures and throughout history. They are called Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. Likewise, management scholars Shanahan and Hyman (2003) have contributed “a virtue ethics scale” and Chun (2005) has developed a “virtuous ethical character scale.”

In the business ethics literature, Solomon (1993) made the first attempt to cataloguing the virtues. Solomon finds that the long list of traditional virtues in everyday life works rather well in business life as well. I agree. Business ethics is not about the discovery of any new values or norms that should regulate the conduct of business. Business ethics is about the uncovering of the ethical foundations that are already there, in the world of business. Thus, what the study of ethics in business ethics provides is not new knowledge but a renewed sense of purpose and vision. Solomon does not propose new virtues but just specifies the content of the traditional virtues in the world of business, given that some virtues are particular to specific practices. The virtues that are essential to the practice of business, which are called the basic business virtues are honesty, fairness, trust, and toughness. Solomon also lists those virtues that are more specific to the corporate self, namely, friendliness, honor, loyalty, and shame (1993: 217). Other virtues such as caring and compassion constitute emotions that are fundamental in corporate life. The ultimate virtue of corporate life – and “an utter necessity,” Solomon argues – is justice because it maintains the bond between the individual and the organization by treating people for what they are. Again, the list is not comprehensive.

And it is controversial. Business executives and management scholars have alleged that there is a contradiction between obligations to the organization and obligations qua person which creates conflicts of virtue – that is, between role virtues and generic virtues; business life demands the development of special role virtues – such as ruthlessness (Nagel, 1979), toughness (Carr, 1968) and undermines the agent’s sense of personal integrity (Williams, 1985). In chapter five, I shall argue that such a claim is untenable.

1.5. MEETING PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM

Building on the findings of the previous three sections, I shall reaffirm here the following four claims. First, as described above, virtues are thick ethical concepts, in which facts and values are entangled, such that they are and can be employed in explanations and evaluations of agents. Second, and as a result, virtues can defeat the *is/ought* thesis and thus, a character-based account of business ethics fares better than competing business ethics theories in bringing together explanations and justifications of behavior in organizations. Third, as opposed to its rival theories, any character-based moral theory provides a natural account of moral motivation which allows it to pass the test of psychological realism. Fourth, the requirement of psychological realism demands from any virtue ethical theory a threefold commitment, namely, that (1) there are character traits; (2) people differ in their character traits, and (3) people can develop the sort of traits postulated by virtue ethicists. The preceding conclusions should be especially appealing to both the philosopher and the social scientist in business ethics; they must encourage this project of thinking about organizational ethics in ways that give a fundamental place to virtues and vices.

1.5.1. Virtues as Entangled Notions

Action-based normative theories are exclusively concerned either with thin deontological concepts such as ‘right’ and ‘ought’ or with thin axiological concepts like ‘good.’ They often hold a strong version of the fact/value dichotomy, according to which factual description and moral evaluation are completely separated. For reasons already exposed, those accounts are unsatisfactory. Virtues, on the other hand, are morally “thick concepts.” (Williams, 1985: 140-143) A thick ethical concept is a concept such that, when it is used in judgments by the right kind of agent, it has the feature that the judgment as a whole is both responsive to how the world is and gives the agent reasons for action. ‘Coward,’ ‘lie,’ ‘brutality,’ and ‘gratitude’ are a few examples of thick ethical concepts, concepts that sustain an ethical load of a culturally-conditioned form. Thick notions succeed both in being action-guiding and in making available something that can reasonably be described as ethical knowledge.³⁰ Given that our community – in our case the organization – has arrived at the concept of, say, cowardice, that is to say it has become clear about the circumstances under which the concept is or is not applicable, there can be facts about cowardice (hence, ethical facts) and also justified true beliefs about cowardice (hence, ethical knowledge). And such knowledge can be lost, in fact it will probably be lost if the concept and its social context – the organization – is lost

³⁰ In his debate with Harman and Thomson on moral explanations, Sturgeon (1986) suggests the use of aretaic concepts in explanations. I cannot do justice to the metaethical dispute here. But it may be useful to introduce Sturgeon’s claim. Roughly, in response to Harman’s contention that no moral fact is ever part of the best explanation of a non-moral fact’s truth – Harman uses this premise to conclude that there are no moral facts – Sturgeon presents a number of counterexamples in which it is alleged that a moral fact plays a crucial role in a good explanation of some non-moral fact’s truth. The best known example is the case of Hitler’s depravity. According to Sturgeon, “Hitler’s moral depravity – i.e., the fact of his really having been morally depraved – forms part of a reasonable explanation of why we believe he was depraved.” (1986: 234) Similarly, Sturgeon argues that the fact that slavery was a more oppressive institution in the United States during the years between the American Revolution and the Civil War than it had been before or elsewhere partially explains the growth of antislavery sentiment in the United States during that time (1986: 245).

(Foot, 1978). As Putnam argues, what is characteristic of negative descriptions like ‘cruel’ and ‘positive’ descriptions like ‘brave’ – virtues and vices – is that in order to use them with any discrimination one has to be able to identify with an evaluative point of view. That is why the understanding of ‘brave’ as simply ‘not afraid to risk life and limb’ is poor, because it overlooks the important distinction between mere ‘rashness’ or ‘foolhardiness’ and genuine ‘bravery’ (2002: 39-40).

Now, consider again the case of Paul Rusesabagina. The word ‘courage’ has obvious normative connotations. By saying that Rusesabagina was brave – while Munyeshyaka was not – we are commending Rusesabagina as a hotel manager and as a man. But the word courage can be used in a purely descriptive way as well. For example, the journalist reports that his courage and bravery saved hundreds of lives from the genocide in Rwanda. Similarly, Aaron Feuerstein is pictured as a kind and benevolent businessman, Bernie Madoff as a sick person, and Silvio Berlusconi as a womanizer. ‘Cruel,’ ‘generous,’ ‘gauche,’ ‘weak,’ ‘courageous,’ ‘kind’ and many other words ignore the alleged fact/value distinction and allow themselves to be used in normative as well as descriptive statements. An enormous amount of our descriptive vocabulary is and has to be entangled. And the virtues are the most conspicuous example. As will be discussed in chapter three, the application of thick ethical concepts such as virtues and vices “is at the same time world-guided and action-guiding.” (Williams, 1985: 141)

In sum, it is essential to a theory of virtue that it provides psychological explanations as well as normative descriptions. This is a clear advantage of virtue ethics over competing normative theories in business ethics. Virtue ethics fares better by bridging the gap between the empirical inquiry and substantive ethical evaluations, by

stressing that valuation and description are interdependent, and by using a vocabulary of entangled concepts that is the most amenable to the social scientist. Virtues (and vices) are thick notions; virtues cannot be merely factored into a descriptive part and an evaluative part.

1.5.2. A More Realistic Moral Psychology

I have argued that developing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal is constrained by a requirement of psychological realism. For one cannot meet the demand of a moral theory if such a demand is beyond the capacity of the sort of people that, on other important grounds, “we should want there to be.” Hence, there might be enough grounds for rejecting a normative conception if it depicts a way of life that is psychologically unrealizable.

An advantage of a character-based theory is that it allows for a more complex and realistic account of ethical motivation than competing normative theories in business ethics, as explained in the previous section. Virtue ethics provides greater resources of psychological realism than other approaches to help understand morality through the study of ethical character traits, their relationship to emotional tendencies, and their role in explanation and evaluation of agents.

A clarification is in order: the reference to competing normative theories in business ethics should be understood here as “comprehensive” normative theories, namely, Kantian theory (Bowie, 1999; Arnold, 2003), consequentialist theories (Snoeyenbos and Humber, 1999; Gustafson, 2006; Jensen, 2001); and social contract theories (Keeley, 1988; Donaldson and Dunfee, 1999; Hsieh, 2008).

Deontological, consequentialist, and contractualist theories in business ethics may not pass the test of psychological realism. My claim is not original. A standard objection against utilitarian theories – though not all utilitarians are crude act utilitarians, of course – is that they have an overdemanding commitment to impartiality, in the sense that that the right thing to do is whatever maximizes overall utility for each and every action opportunity. There are two problems with this formula. First, the reality of human life is such that we usually cannot either calculate or act on what this maximization demands because of our natural partiality to our family, our interests, and other commitments (Williams, 1985). Second, there are so many action opportunities we fail to recognize, so the theory requires “an utterly impossible amount of attention to one’s action options and to the ranking of outcomes.” (Flanagan, 1991: 34) Utilitarianism – at least act utilitarianism – is too demanding, both from an ethical and an epistemological point of view. As a result of those human limitations, it is alleged that utilitarianism cannot play a genuine role in our lives; the moral norms proposed by utilitarian theories should be rejected as spurious (Griffin, 1996). Utilitarians may respond by emphasizing the distinction between a theory as a decision procedure – i.e. how we should go about deciding how to act – and a theory as a criterion – i.e., what in the end makes an act right or wrong (Railton, 1984). So, utilitarians may resist the claim of unrealism by claiming that impartiality is not meant as an action-guiding principle but, rather, as a criterion (Brink, 1986). But such a reply does not succeed because – as we have seen while discussing the (OC) principle – any criterion of right and wrong must also be constrained by human capacities, otherwise it would be too remote from human practices and lose its standing as a criterion.³¹ Under a standard reading of the requirement of psychological

³¹ Still, there might be a way to defend the distinction between action-guiding principle and criterion. After

realism, no act can be right if it is beyond human capacities to act in that way, or wrong if it is beyond human capacities to avoid acting in that way; therefore utilitarianism is problematic as a moral theory, at least in the realm of business ethics.

What about deontological theories? There is, first, a charge of excessive abstraction against Kantian theory, because it requires a person engaged in moral deliberation to treat her own inclinations and personal attachments with indifference, factoring out all particular features of a situation (including the psychological peculiarities of the persons involved) beyond those which define the situation as a situation of a moral kind (Flanagan, 1999: 86). This sort of abstraction would entail a problem of a cognitive impossibility with Kantian theory. Alternatively, even if it is within our psychological possibility range, it might be thought that such an abstraction is nonetheless morally undesirable; these are not the sort of persons “we should want there to be” (see section two). Furthermore, the agent does face moments when deontological theories makes a moral demand on him that conflicts with his actual motivation. So he would like to know what authority these obligations have, in other words, why they should move him. Since it is so hard to see where these personal obligations are coming from, it is hard as well to accept that they constitute reasons for action, (let alone reasons strong enough to outweigh the agent’s actual present motivation). Moreover, Kant advocates an unbridgeable gap between moral justification and motivation, such that if we made the justificatory principles into our motives, the results would be destructive to the moral life and our relationships with other human beings. A world without love and

all, no one can always think logically. But that does not affect the truths of logic. So it may be that we should accept virtue ethics or some other doctrine because no human being can meet the demands of utilitarianism but we might still say that a certain sophisticated sort of utilitarianism describes the best conceivable world, for which we should strive. Yet, if doing so will make things worse, then we should not try for it. I thank Ed Hartman for raising this point.

friendship is not only undesirable (Stocker, 1976) but psychologically impossible (Flanagan, 1991). Finally, and this is a more controversial charge, experimental philosophers appeal to a sort of psychological realism to challenge the Kantian claim that agents should act specifically on consciously chosen principles. They conclude that a Kantian is “likely to have to treat as immoral a lot of apparently moral individuals because of the largely unrealistic demands of Kant’s moral psychology” (Knobe and Leiter, 2006: 33).

Concerning contractualism, at first glance it seems that the principles that come out of social contract theories can meet the requirement of psychological realism. Yet, the initial attraction may not go deep. The problem of impartiality and overdemandingness are equally serious for utilitarian, deontological, and social contract theories. Recall that in a contractualist view, the principles of morality are determined through unforced, hypothetical general agreement. The conditions under which an agreement is reached are specified. Its scope is universal, it involves a specific determination of moral duties, it is impartial, it holds that one’s pursuit of the good is constrained by and subordinated to the demands of the right, it takes as fundamental a natural equality of moral status (Rawls, 1971; Scanlon, 1998). The source of moral motivation here is a desire that one’s actions are justifiable to others.³² Contractualists take this motivational desire as a given in most people. This kind of moral argument triggers the source of moral motivation found in the desire to be able to justify our actions to all others who are similarly motivated. Such a desire is basic, triggered by a belief that an action is right. Yet, the contractualist account may not be the most plausible account of moral motivation, for it overlooks the sources

³² Roughly, on grounds that would be reasonable for everyone to choose under the veil of ignorance in Rawls and in grounds that they could not reasonably reject in Scanlon.

of motivation found in our pursuit of the good life. If some of the important human goods include friendship, community attachments, and projects whose pursuit lends meaning to one's life, having these sorts of goods entails having certain motives for action. So, if the ultimate source of moral motivation is the desire for justifiability, then the possibility of pursuing certain of these crucial human goods is undermined. If I am moved to action solely by the desire for justifiability, then this motivation precludes one of the motivations involved in friendship; for example, that I perform an action only for the sake of my friend and for no other reason, such as the realization that my friend is a person for whom the notion of justifiability makes sense (Stocker, 1976; Wolf, 1982; Williams, 1985).³³ Thus, the problem with social contract theory is that it cannot fully account for the motivational sources grounding these fundamental human pursuits. Once again, the objection might run as denying that this sort of desire is within our range of psychological capacities or, even if possible, as ethically undesirable. Another difficulty with the contractualist moral psychology is related to the construction of the veil of ignorance and the original position device for the purpose of defending the principles of justice. Rawls argues that the parties in the original position do not know their economic or political situation, the level of civilization they have been able to achieve, or the contingencies that set them in opposition. But they do know some general laws pertaining to political affairs and economic theory. And, as he puts it, "they know the basis of social organization and the laws of human psychology." (Rawls, 1971: 137) This claim relies on

³³Social contract theorists may reply that the desire for justifiability is not the only source of moral motivation. Perhaps it is merely the winning source. But even in this case, the problem remains, because we all recognize that among the valuable traits and activities that humans might positively embrace are some which we hope that, if a person does embrace them, "he does so not for moral reason." (Wolf, 1982: 434) In other words, we have reasons to hope that a person does not wholly rule and direct his life by such abstract and impersonal considerations.

the assumption that knowledge of human personality is atemporal and impersonal. And such an assumption is problematic. As Wolff argues, in order to maintain that the parties in the original position will know the laws of human psychology without any knowledge of whom they are, “whether they are old or young, male or female, white or black, homosexual or heterosexual, is to say that they will actually *understand* the laws of moral psychology, not merely that they will mouth certain empty phrases. And that, I suggest, is not possible, if Freud and the psychoanalytic tradition is correct” (1977: 132).³⁴

These are just some of the objections that have been raised against the moral psychology that underlies deontological, consequentialist, and social contract theories in business ethics. The list is not exhaustive and I cannot do justice here to the many replies and counter replies that have been discussed in the literature. Meeting the requirement of psychological realism is only a necessary condition. Still, it is necessary. It might be the case that some of the replies succeed. If so, then the challenged theories might meet the requirement of psychological realism. But I do not need to defend the strong claim that deontological, consequentialist, and contractualist business ethics theories fail the test of psychological realism. For my purpose, it is enough to defend a weaker claim, namely, that virtue ethics is more psychologically realistic. In other words, virtue ethics fares better than deontological, consequentialist, and contractualist business ethics theories with reference to psychological realism.

In any event, I do claim that the theory of virtue that I defend here meets the requirement. But this is not to say that *any* theory of virtue is immune to the charges of

³⁴ One might reply that Rawls is not committed to the notion that his founding citizens are in a situation that could actually happen. Granted. Unlike virtue ethicists, and like utilitarians, Rawls, Scanlon, and the like are not in the business of explaining human behavior. We might want everyone to be entirely rational, but we might at the same time reject a moral theory that assumes that they are. We might suppose that such a theory has worse consequences than a theory that takes account of human weakness.

being psychologically unrealistic. Indeed, ancient versions of virtue ethics are open to a number of objections in this respect. For instance, as mentioned in the previous section, the old thesis of the unity of virtues – according to which the morally excellent person is required to possess every virtue – seems to be problematic, because, among other reasons, there might be qualities of the list of virtues which are inconsistent with one another (Flanagan, 1991). The unity thesis has been discredited not only on empirical grounds (Doris, 2002) but also on normative grounds, even by contemporary virtue ethicists (Badhwar, 1996; Sreenivasan, 2009). A qualified version of the thesis has been recently defended by interpreting that perfect and complete possession of one virtue requires the knowledge that is needed for the possession of every other virtue (Wolf, 2007). In any case, the thesis of the unity of the virtues is not essential to virtue ethics.

Another crucial challenge to virtue ethics has been raised on grounds of psychological realism. Building upon a fair amount of evidence in experimental social psychology, Mischel (1968) maintains that there are no character traits and Harman (1999) and Doris (1998; 2002) argue that social psychologists failed to find any effect of character traits on explaining and predicting behavior whatsoever. A number of organizational scholars confirm these results (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1986; Snyder and Ickes, 1995). The objection is crucial. For it entails the conclusion that, as a matter of psychological fact, people cannot develop the sort of character traits advocated by virtue ethicists. If the objection holds, it follows that virtue ethics relies on an empirically unrealistic moral psychology. In chapter four, I shall argue that the objection does not succeed.

1.5.3. The Demands of Psychological Realism

The virtues benefit the agent as a human being, by constituting her flourishing. She flourishes only if she is virtuous, because human nature is such that flourishing for humans requires us to live in a virtuous way. An ethical theory is weakened if the best contemporary science conflicts with its claims or makes it hard to see how they could be true. This is even more critical for a theory of virtue. In the ancient world, classical forms of virtue ethics appealed to the best science available (Annas, 2002). And contemporary virtue ethics looks at human nature to find out about patterns of flourishing particular to the species from the best contemporary science. Thus, the account presented here, whose main components were anticipated in the previous section, can pass the test of psychological realism: it provides a rich account of moral motivation and a natural account of our ethical life. Without a psychologically plausible story of how it is possible for rationally bounded creatures like human beings to be virtuous, virtue ethics is in trouble and, it might be contended, it would not be a genuine alternative to other normative theories in business ethics as it is alleged.

The requirement of psychological realism, however, sets a number of constraints for the development of any plausible account of virtue ethics. In order for any virtue theory to be psychologically realistic, the following claims must be true. First, as a matter of fact, there are character traits. Second, human beings differ in the character traits they possess. Third, people can develop the sort of traits that constitute the virtues. If any these claims is false, I submit, charges of lack of psychological realism are in place.

Let me briefly elaborate on the reasons underlying these claims. An extensive discussion as regards to the first and the third claim is provided in chapter four. And the second claim will be addressed in chapters two and three.

Are there any (character) traits? If there are none, needless to say, the very project of developing a character-based theory would look unrealistic. The preliminary answer is yes: there are character traits. The language of character traits – thick concepts, as well – picks out psychologically real phenomena. Moreover, traits are an important part of how we talk and think about each other. Laypeople also engage in personality assessments in their daily lives. Our folk psychology includes the notion that at least some behavior is explained by traits. The best contemporary science substantiates my claim. Psychologists have found the existence of personality traits; trait theory has a long and respectable history in psychology; it measures personality traits and uses them in explanations and predictions of behavior (Allport, 1937). Now, we need to say much more about what is meant by the term ‘character traits’. The first issue is whether these traits are global, that is, relatively context insensitive. Both conceptual analysis and empirical studies show that character traits are not totally situation insensitive (Funder, 2001). That means that trait attribution does entail that a trait is displayed no matter what. Indeed, we should expect that certain traits are only appropriately active in some contexts and, even within the appropriate context, their frequency of activation shows further sensitivity to the environment (Pervin, Cervone, and John, 2005). Another important issue is whether we assume, in taking a stance towards ourselves and one another, that there are character traits and that those traits are indeed global. The answer is, again, yes. We assume that there are character traits and we tend to assume more cross-situational consistency than

the evidence bears, though we do not assume that traits are completely uncircumscribed (Funder, 2001; Doris, 2002). In addition, there is the issue of self-other asymmetry in trait attributions. That is, traits are perceived as applying more unconditionally – that is, less context sensitively – to others than to ourselves. The evidence shows that people highlight their positive characteristics and discount their negatives; they give themselves more responsibility for their successes but take less responsibility for their failures than they extend to others (Messick and Bazerman, 1996).

These clarifications are important because social psychologists may take virtue ethicists to hold the view that virtues are context-insensitive. Chapter four shall be concerned more with the question of whether character traits exist and whether they make significant contributions to explaining behavior in organizations, than with the question of whether our folk psychological assessments of personality are likely to be accurate.

Second, I argue that if it is going to be psychologically realistic, a theory of virtue is committed to the proposition that people differ in the character traits they possess. The very notion of ‘trait’ entails ways in which people differ from each other. Although the notion and moral status of character traits will be our main concern in chapter two, I need to say here that my use of the term refers to the complex of standing inclinations to perceive, think, feel, and respond in characteristic ways in certain situations; situations that are defined as “situations of a certain kind” by the inclinations in question. Having said what a trait is, we need to make clear what it is not. A trait ascription entails that some sort of regularities obtain, and it poses a dispositional cause for these regularities (Allport, 1943). But the trait term does not by itself reveal the precise nature of the regularities it implies. A trait is not a single linear disposition that bears a one-to-one

correspondence with a certain behavior. Trait attribution serves descriptive, explanatory, and evaluative functions. That is, traits may be used to summarize the agent's past behavior and predict the agent's future behavior, to explain the agent's behavior with reference to the individual's character rather than in terms of features of the situation,³⁵ and to provide evaluations of the agent, her activities and practices in a way that the value of the virtues – and the disvalue of the vices – attaches directly to their possessor rather than its products. Notice the dual dimension of trait ascriptions. Traits are, again, thick ethical concepts. Thus, in one sense, we care about how honest, unkind, or loyal an agent is in an absolute sense. Yet, in the second sense, traits describe the degree to which the agent might be more or less honest, kind, or loyal than someone else (technically, personality psychologists measure traits using ordinal rather than cardinal scales). People attain different excellent states of character and in different degrees, and it is part of our task to understand and assess how people are different from one another. This of course does not entail that people cannot have certain traits in common. Indeed, some aspects of human psychology may be largely common to all people.³⁶ A theory of virtue must also acknowledge and understand the ways in which each person is unique. Finally, the existence of those individual differences does not entail that they directly and unfailingly reflect on the agents' behavior. As previously mentioned, traits are context-sensitive.

The third claim is that people can develop the sort of traits that constitute the virtues (and rid themselves of the vices). If people cannot be virtuous, there appear to be

³⁵ Character traits are supposed to be explanatory in that it will at least sometimes be correct to explain actions in terms of character traits and not just in terms of features of the situation. For example, it will at least sometimes be correct to explain Aaron Feuerstein's behavior by appeal to his benevolence and not just to features of the situation that would lead not only Feuerstein but any CEO to act benevolently in such a situation.

³⁶ Yet, if everyone shares the very same set of character traits, one may be forced to explain differences in behavior – in case there are still individual differences in behavior in such a world – with reference only to situational variables.

difficulties for a theory that prescribe that they be so. Virtue ethicists may disagree. They might argue that virtue theories require not the realization of virtue but only that we ought to strive for virtue, in which such striving is possible even if we often fail. A virtue theory according to which the virtues are unattainable, yet function as regulative ideals that inspire people to live better lives is problematic. Surely there is a case to be made for them, but it may be psychologically unrealistic.

This brings us back to the discussion of the sort of ‘can’t’ that defeats ‘ought’ in the ought-implies-can principle. My reading of the principle is not strict. A virtue is not an unattainable idea; it is within the possibility space of human beings. Of course there are many senses of capacity. There are things that logically I am not capable of doing; there are things that metaphysically I am not capable of doing; there are things that physically I am not capable of doing. None of them represents the sense of capacity relative to the claim that people can (or cannot) attain the virtues. Gandhi famously wrote that “whatever is possible for me is possible even for a child.” (1948: 7). But that is not the sense of capacity that is relevant here either. The kind of ‘can’t’ that defeats ‘ought’ is not to be found by reference to the capacities of moral saints. And it is not to be found by reference to the behavior of agents acting under extremely desperate circumstances either. Even if great self-sacrifice was within the range of psychological possibility of Father Kolbe or Todd Beamer³⁷ that may not be an indication of the capacities of the normative agents we should want there to be. The sort of people we want there to be will be deeply committed to certain other persons by ties of love and affection, they will be committed to certain goals and institutions and not to others, and they will be committed

³⁷ Todd Beamer was an Oracle Inc. executive from Hightstown, N.J and one of the passengers of the hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 who attempted to overpower the hijackers in September 11, 2001.

to certain ground projects that are different from the ground projects of the impartial point of view. Even if complete impartiality is within the possibility space of some humans, we should not want to be like those people. So, the sort of people we should want there to be can definitively attain the virtues.

In sum, a theory of virtues, handled in an appropriate way, offers better hope of being psychologically realistic than do other prominent pictures of the ethical life. Such a theory will be a better tool in understanding morality. And it will be more successful in acknowledging psychological connections between the ethical and other aspects of character.

1.6. CONCLUSION

Ethics – and the ethics of business – existed long before philosophy came to the scene. People in general and people in business have their own sets of beliefs that may have been somewhat influenced by moral philosophers and business ethicists but, as we just saw, not more than a bit. Those beliefs often have flaws, an obvious one being that they are unimaginative and too undemanding. Perhaps this is all we can reasonably hope for. But normative theorists in business ethics should seriously consider what we can expect to contribute to these ethics and to the field. Among other things, we must pay more attention to certain matters of fact. We need to develop more realistic theories. And we should take into account the limits of human motivation. And we should understand how these facts may affect the content of our obligations. And we should examine what the best scientific theories have to say about the sort of character traits we can reasonably cultivate. We should be concerned with what cognitive science and evolutionary psychology have to tell us about ethics.

In this chapter, I have sketched my project. I aim to contribute to the development of a theory of virtue in organizations. As part of the project, I shall provide a psychological account of character, in which character notions have priority over deontic notions. Such an account will be superior to competing business ethics theories in that it will supply a natural account of moral motivations and it will bring together explanations and evaluations of behavior in organizations. For virtues are entangled notions. And judgments about character are responsive to matters of facts and matters of valuation.

We have found that normative theories in business ethics should meet a constraint, the requirement of psychological realism. The theory of virtue we are pursuing will pass the test of psychological realism.

The most important part of Anscombe's seminal article ("Modern Moral Philosophy") is, in my view, not the call for returning to the virtues but the claim that I selected as the initial quote of this chapter. Ethics, to be done suitably, needs to be based on a reasonable philosophy of psychology, which was sorely lacking in the 1950s. We are in a better position than Anscombe to meet her demands. One of the tasks we need to accomplish is to provide an account of the notion of virtue and an analysis of the nature of virtue attribution. We do not yet know from a psychological point of view what a virtue is, how the virtues are individuated, how they interact with each other and with other mental states, how context sensitive they are, how they connect with behavior. We shall answer these questions in the following paragraphs.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MORALITY OF VIRTUE

Queen: *O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.*

Hamlet: *O, throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half,
Good night—but go not to my uncle's bed.
Assume a virtue, if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat
Of habits evil, is angel yet in this,
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery,
That aptly is put on. Refrain to-night,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence; the next more easy;
For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
And either exorcise the devil, or throw him out
With wondrous potency. Once more, good night;
And when you are desirous to be blest,
I'll blessing beg of you.*

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene iv.

The theory of virtue sketched in chapter one shifts attention from morality as a system of principles or rules to its psychological and social embodiment in individual tendencies of action, thought and emotional reaction. It draws attention to the variety of reasons for action that play a part in our moral life, beyond rights, obligations, and utility. These reasons for action may not embody virtue concepts themselves. They may not involve reflection on the agent's own virtues either. But the theory of virtue introduced in chapter one can help explain how considerations such as 'he needs it' can function as an agent's reasons. And it can also explain why ethically correct action may only be partly codified and may involve an appeal to judgment and wisdom.

Consider the case of Jennifer. Why did she return the wallet filled with lots of money that she found last week in a public toilet (with all the cash in it)? Perhaps only to impress her boss, who happened to be walking with her that afternoon. Perhaps she was expecting a reward from the owner. Maybe she thought it was the right thing to do. Perhaps out of concern for the owner's welfare. And, if the latter, maybe it was just a random, out of character action and due more to the fact that she was listening to her favorite song. Or perhaps it was indeed in character for her; honesty may be one of her character traits, which was manifested in her action.

Compare her case with Robert who was selected 2007 CEO of the year. He appears to be a role model for everyone in the company. But he does not care at all for customers, employees, or shareholders. He does everything for the sake of his multimillion-dollar income. He detests his job and hates having to spend time with customers and employees. But he can be reliably counted upon not to do what is wrong. Indeed, he does not do anything wrong! He only does the right thing by fulfilling his duties, honoring his promises, taking into account the overall positive consequences of his decisions, and so on.

These are the sort of examples used in theories of virtue to highlight the importance of the virtues as opposed to principles and duties. Still, virtue ethicists argue that the reasons why Jennifer did what she did are uninteresting from the moral point of view. And they do not have anything to reproach against Robert insofar as he does not do anything that is morally objectionable. For different reasons, social scientists tend to concur with that view. How is that possible? In this chapter, I shall argue that at least two

conflicting conceptualizations of virtue are in place. And I shall defend the claim that only one is plausible.

The importance of the question of the nature of virtues cannot be overemphasized. The theory to whose development I aim to contribute depends on a notion of virtue that is defensible (Adams, 2006). If such a theory is going to be psychologically realistic and suitable to deal with ethical issues in organizations, it must provide an account of the links between virtues and behavior (Hurka, 2001). Furthermore, the status of virtues is a necessary step in establishing the proper place of moral character in a moral theory (Hursthouse, 2006; Swanton, 2003; Nussbaum, 1999; Watson, 1990). Defining the status of virtues is crucial to address the recent Situationist challenge on virtue theories over the existence of character traits (more on chapter four). Finally, the research question of this chapter can help us in our understanding of whether we can be held morally responsible for our states of character (Audi, 1997; Levi, 2002; Sher, 2006) and for the organizational structures we help to create and sustain (Jacobs, 2001).

Chapter two is organized around the issue of the nature of virtue. Ancient and contemporary versions of ethics of virtue have offered a number of divergent conceptions of virtue, various lists of virtues, and several ways to rank them. There is no real unity over the issue of what virtue is and is not. In this chapter, I shall defend the claim that reducing virtues to behavioral dispositions to behave in accordance with certain principles deprives the essence of virtue. If, as some philosophers and most psychologists claim, virtues should be understood as behavioral dispositions, all that matters would be to identify the principles that determine what actions are morally correct. Moral character

would not be taken seriously by such a strategy because in that view, virtues would be ultimately reduced to moral principles and aretaic notions would have a secondary place.

The chapter is organized as follows. In section one, I shall survey the literature on the nature of virtue in philosophy and psychology. In section two, I shall present a summary and critical review of alternative conceptualizations of virtue as habits, skills, and dispositions and a discussion of the consequences of treating virtues according to these alternative views. I shall argue that the objections against the definition of virtues as behavioral dispositions are insurmountable. In section three, I shall introduce a non-reductive account, which conceptualizes virtues as character traits and character as the settled pattern of motives, desires, values, emotions, framing capacities, and behavior that lead us to call someone a person of a certain sort. In section four, I shall show how the conceptualization of virtues is intrinsically connected to the role of character in moral theory and business ethics theorizing. In section five, I shall illustrate the differences between a reductive and a non-reductive account using the virtues of gratitude and self-respect. Section six concludes.

2.1. THE REHABILITATION OF CHARACTER IN PHILOSOPHY AND THE SCIENCES

As described in chapter one, the emergence of contemporary virtue ethics has had an invigorating effect on mainstream moral theory. And it has had a stimulating impact on the social sciences as well. There is a longstanding concern with character and traits in psychology, particularly trait theory in personality psychology, which has been recently revitalized by “positive psychology,” a recent movement which is focused on the study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to flourish. I shall

briefly review the literature and suggest that there are some difficulties and ambiguities in defining the notion of virtue.

2.1.1. Virtues in the Social Sciences

The history of Trait theory is frequently traced back to ancient Greece, when Hippocrates described human temperament in terms of so-called bodily humors (e.g., sanguine, melancholic, choleric, and phlegmatic). Charles Darwin's emphasis on individual variation based on genetic differences is usually included as part of this trend. Freud's and Jung's theories set in motion an influential stream of work on traits and personality types. But the scholar who is usually mentioned as the founding figure of the trait approach is Gordon Allport. Escaping both a psychoanalytic and a behaviorist approach, Allport thought that language has evolved to capture the important aspects of personality and postulated a common-sense approach to personality based on language, a lexical hypothesis. Allport (1937) argued that although behavior is variable, there is also a constant portion for each person, which corresponds to each person's unique, key qualities. According to this view, those unique traits rather than common traits are the real units of personality. They exist within an individual and have status as psychophysical realities. Traits are understood, in this theory, as personal dispositions, in terms of a person's goals, motives, or styles that are peculiar to the individual. Allport distinguishes cardinal, central, and secondary traits. Those rare traits that exert a significant influence on behavior are termed cardinal dispositions. Central traits are general characteristics that can be found to some degree in every person, and secondary traits are those characteristics that are seen only in certain circumstances (Allport, 1937).

Another widely cited trait theory is British psychologist Raymond Cattell's, which applied factor analytic techniques – a correlational procedure that uses variables collected from one person on many different occasions – to personality. Cattell distinguished traits from states. The former are relatively permanent dispositions and the latter are temporary conditions within an individual. Cattell's theory defines traits as the units of personality that have predictive value; a trait is what defines what a person will do when faced with a given situation. Funder (1997) observes that there are three notable aspects of any trait theory, namely, that the approach is based on empirical research, that an ultimate criterion for any measurement of a personality trait is whether it can be used to predict behavior, and that it focuses exclusively on individual differences.

Even though character and virtues were prominent topics a long time ago, they lost its reputation in psychology when the social sciences decisively moved to split scientific fact from moral value, following the dominant trend in the development of the social sciences that was discussed in chapter one. That explains a shift of focus from character to personality in the 1930s, when personality traits were distinguished as scientific phenomena from character and virtues, the latter understood as normative elements of social ethics. Character – seen as a moral term – was gradually substituted by personality – an allegedly amoral term (Haidt, 2006). A physical trait – say, “fat” – describes a person's physical features or physical abilities. A personality trait – say, “dull” – focuses on her personality. Personality traits, as studied by psychologists, are distinguished from character traits, which are the main concern of philosophers. They are a subset of personality traits that have a moral dimension (Gert, 1988; Brandt, 1970). This treatment is actually suggested by Aristotle when he distinguishes virtue and moral

goodness from other aspects of our inner selves because only the virtues are matters of choice. Some virtue ethicists in business ethics – such as Solomon (2005), Hartman, (1998) and Moberg (1999) – have suggested that those character traits of interest for virtue ethics supervene on the traits studied by personality psychology.¹ Others – such as Audi (1997) – have stressed the distinction between character and personality because two people can be radically different in personality yet quite alike in moral character.

More recently, a new stream of research in the field of psychology was inaugurated: Positive psychology. Like personality psychologists, so-called “positive psychologists” advocate the study of character and virtue as “legitimate topics of psychological inquiry and informed societal discourse” (Peterson and Seligman, 2004: 3). Positive psychology intends to address the issue of mental health, wellness, and well-being above and beyond the absence of disease, distress, and disorder, focusing on subjective experiences, positive traits, and institutions that enable positive experiences and positive traits (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Different from traditional psychology – which focuses on human pathology and relies on the assumption that humans are inherently weak and frail – positive psychology is intended as a complement whose focus is human strength and thriving. And as opposed to those psychologists holding a strong distinction between personality and character traits, positive

¹ Consider a person who is utterly fearless in two different situations. In the first, he is being assaulted by an unarmed mugger; in the second, he is being assaulted by six armed muggers. His state of mind is in some obvious sense identical in the two cases, but whereas in the first case he is showing courage, in the second case he is showing foolhardiness. I thank Ed Hartman for the example. Brian McLaughlin (2001) defines supervenience as follows: “A set of properties *A* supervenes upon another set *B* just in case no two things can differ with respect to *A*-properties without also differing with respect to their *B*-properties. In slogan form, “there cannot be an *A*-difference without a *B*-difference.” Davidson says that “mental characteristics are in some sense dependent, or supervenient, on physical characteristics. Such supervenience might be taken to mean that there cannot be two events exactly alike in all physical respects but differing in some mental respects, or that an object cannot alter in some mental respects without altering in some physical respects.” (1970: 214).

psychologists seem to be less concerned with the fact/value dichotomy. It should be so if they intend to use the terminology of ‘positive states’ meaningfully.

The rehabilitation of virtue in the social sciences by positive psychologists entails recognizing individual differences and postulating that those differences are stable and general, though changeable and shaped by the individual’s setting. Positive psychology provides psychologists with a way to think, operationalize, and measure virtues thereby making character a legitimate topic of scientific research. It provides “strategies of measurement and explanatory power out of the realm and reach of philosophy,” however we understand this clause (Peterson and Seligman, 2004:13) According to positive psychology, individuals and their traits need to be accorded a central role in understanding the good life. Construing character as positive traits allows us to acknowledge and explain features of the good life.

Like personality psychologists, positive psychologists define virtues and strengths in behavioral terms.² In the core text in positive psychology, Peterson and Seligman define character strengths as “the psychological ingredients – process or mechanisms – that define the virtues” or “distinguishable routes to display one or another of the virtues” (2004:13). For instance, the virtue of wisdom can be achieved through such strengths as creativity, curiosity, love of learning, and open mindedness. Peterson and Seligman conclude that someone is of good character if he or she displays the strengths within a virtue group.

² Peterson and Seligman have collected dozens of inventories of virtues and strengths to put together a list of so-called universal human strengths, including those from historical leaders like Charlemagne and Benjamin Franklin to contemporary figures like William Bennett and Sir John Templeton, mission statements by the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Guides of Canada, and those attributed to Merlin the Wizard, character education programs, and virtue messages in Hallmark greeting cards, popular song lyrics, etc. Moreover, professional organizations and consultants have identified good habits relevant to excellence in the workplace (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001), among them empathy, inclusiveness, and positivity.

In management scholarship and business ethics a cousin of positive psychology is the new field of study called Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), which is also concerned with the virtues. POS pursues the systematic study of positive outcomes, attributes, and processes within organizations. Rather than providing a new and comprehensive theory, this movement provides an umbrella term that summarizes how, when, and why individuals achieve the good life in work contexts. Building upon positive psychology, community psychology, and organizational development, POS is focused on flourishing, positive dynamics, and the best of the human conditions as opposed to overcoming ills and solving problems (Cameron, K., Dutton, J., & Quinn, R. E. 2003).

2.1.2. Virtues in Moral Philosophy and the Philosophy of Psychology

As we saw in chapter one, in philosophy, the emergence of virtue ethics has inspired the rehabilitation of character and virtues in normative theory. Consequentialism and deontology have been recently concerned with the topic of virtue in terms of their traditional framework. Interest in Kant's virtue theory has redirected philosophers' attention to Kant's long neglected *Doctrine of Virtue*. Utilitarians are developing consequentialist virtue theories as well.

Recall an important distinction. Virtue ethics is the theory according to which the basic ethical judgments in ethics are judgments about character. Virtue theory designates an alternative account of virtue within one of the other mainstream approaches. The distinction between virtue theory and virtue ethics does not appear in Plato and Aristotle – they engaged in both simultaneously – but divides contemporary authors. Some philosophers argue that even if the standard to evaluate character traits varies for each theory of virtue, the endorsed list of virtues is quite similar from theory to theory (Kagan,

1998). In contrast, some virtue experts – notably, MacIntyre (1984) – claim that theorists have provided many different and incompatible lists of virtues, different rank orders, and incompatible theories of the virtues.

Sophisticated Kantianism and consequentialism may share with virtue ethics a common list of virtues; at least some character traits are likely to emerge as virtues regardless of which foundational theory we embrace.³

But if this is so, does it make any sense to maintain a distinction between virtue ethics and virtue theory? Why bother distinguishing between two theories if, in the end, both advocate a similar inventory of virtues? The crux of this chapter lies in these questions. And the answer has to do with the conceptualization of virtue and the role of character entailed by competing definitions of virtue.

The features that make virtue ethics unique are its concern for the role of motives and passions in good choice, its focus on character, and its emphasis in the whole course of the person's life. As we discussed in chapter one, virtue ethics is a theory concerned with the agent, as opposed to those moral theories that emphasize choice and action. It is concerned with motives, intentions, emotions, and desires, and the inner moral life, rather than with isolated choice and behavior. And it is focused on the whole course of the agent's life rather than on one particular action.

The very project of supplying a theory of virtue in business ethics decisively depends on a plausible conceptualization of virtue. It is crucially connected to the issue of the primacy of character in moral theory, it is central to evaluate whether the empirical evidence accumulated by experimental psychologists undermines virtue ethics, it is also

³ This would not surprise social scientists conducting empirical research in positive psychology. They have discovered a number of ubiquitous, almost universal, core virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004: 33-35).

essential to understand whether we can be held responsible for the virtues and vices we possess and the organizational situations we create and help to sustain, and it is fundamental for a virtue ethical account of moral development and character education.

What is virtue, then? The problem of the nature of virtue has entertained philosophers for thousands of years and it is still open. Consider the original question in Plato's *Meno*, namely, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice or if neither by teaching nor by practice. Socrates responds by saying that until one knows what virtue is, one cannot know how it is to be acquired.

“I am certain that if you were to ask any Athenian whether virtue was natural or acquired, he would laugh in your face, and say: ‘Stranger, you have far too good an opinion of me, if you think that I can answer your question. For I literally do not know what virtue is, and much less whether it is acquired by teaching or not.’ And I myself, Meno, living as I do in this region of poverty, am as poor as the rest of the world; and I confess with shame that I know literally nothing about virtue; and when I do not know the ‘quid’ of anything how can I know the ‘quale’? (*Meno*, 71ab)

Socrates admits the difficulties of defining virtue and ultimately arrives at no definition. Aristotle's definition is still regarded as “one of the less contentious in the history of the concept.” (Zagzebski, 1996: 102)⁴ Virtue, in Aristotle, is a condition of the soul. There are three conditions of the soul, according to the Stagirite, namely, passions, capacities, and states. Passions are “the feelings that are accompanied by pleasure or pain.” Capacities are “the things in virtue of which we are said to be capable of feeling the passions.” And states of character are “the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions.” Aristotle argues that neither the virtues nor the

⁴ Still, whether these definitions represent the Aristotelian conception of virtue is quite disputable, especially considering the problem of translating the Greek words that do not necessarily line up one to one with the English. It is possible that virtues are not much like any of the paradigm cases of state, passion, etc. In addition, the assumption that we have unitary definitions of these terms is equally problematic. I thank Ed Hartman for this suggestion.

vices are passions, because we are not called good or bad on the basis of our passions; we are called good or bad in reference to our virtues and vices. And we are neither praised nor blamed for our passions but for our virtues and our vices. Virtues and vices are not faculties either; for we are not praised or blamed for the simple capacity of feeling the passions. Hence, Aristotle defines a virtue as a state of character. “If the virtues are neither passions nor capacities, the remaining possibility is that they are states.” (*NE*, II, 6, 1106a13-14).

Paraphrasing Kant, we may say that we have not significantly stepped forward in conceptualizing virtue since Aristotle. This may have been a minor problem at the time Anscombe wrote her influential article. But we have now the sources for a “scientific philosophy of psychology.” (Doris and Stich, 2005) And regardless of the opinion of normative theorists and virtue ethicists, social scientists are conducting empirical research on virtues and strengths of character (Chun, 2005; Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Moore, 2009). What sort of “states of character” do the virtues comprise in Aristotle? How different are they from the “virtues” measured and tested by psychologists?

Aristotle argues that all virtues are states of character. But he does not say that all states of character are virtues or vices. Some experts claim that all states of character are either virtues or vices (Dent, 1984). There may be states of character that are neither virtues nor vices, such as, say, curiosity, talkativeness, and shyness. Perhaps not all states of character are virtues or vices. That is another unanswered question.

Following Aristotle’s investigation, philosophers have provided various and conflicting definitions of virtue. The virtues have been conceptualized, at least, as habits (Aristotle; Dewey, 1922; Ryle, 1949; Nussbaum, 1999), skills or abilities (Sigdwick,

1902; Annas, 1995), sentiments (Rawls, 1971), tendencies (Wallace, 1978; Kamtekar, 2005), inclinations (Kant, 1996), and character traits (von Wright, 1963; Solomon, 1992). Some have recently proposed reducing virtues to behavioral dispositions (Doris, 2002; Harman, 2005).

In the following section, I shall assess these proposals and discuss a number of possible objections. And I shall finally argue for a non-reductive account of the virtues.

2.2. WHAT VIRTUE IS NOT: DISPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS OF VIRTUE

In this section, I shall defend the claim that virtues should not be understood as behavioral dispositions. I shall start by briefly introducing the conceptualization of virtues as habits, skills, and dispositions. After discussing the strengths of each account and its compatibility with the virtue project, I shall show why these definitions are problematic.

2.2.1. Virtues as Habits

Virtue is the product of good habits according to Ancient philosophers. Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics all have a lot to say about habituation. In the opening lines of EN Book II, Aristotle closely connects habits and virtue. He says, “virtue of character [i.e., of *ethos*] results from habit [*ethos*]; hence its name ‘ethical’, slightly varied from ‘ethos’ ” (1103a16-17). Moral virtues are excellences of the appetitive or emotional part of the soul, as opposed to the intellectual virtues that have to do with knowledge. In Aristotle, “a state [of character] results from [the repetition of] similar activities.” (EN, 1103b21-22).

“the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.” (*EN*, 1103a32-33)

Virtues regulate our feelings and actions such that the morally virtuous person acts and feels appropriately to the situation he is in, avoiding both excesses and deficiencies. According to this view, virtues are habits of right feeling and action and vices are habits of excessive or deficient feeling and action.⁵

In Plato’s *Republic*, early habituation is quite unreflective (*Republic* 518e, 591b, c). But for those who are able to attain full virtue, habits are supplemented by reflection and deliberation.⁶ Likewise, Aristotle and the Stoics understand habits as a matter of practice, not mindless and repetitive practice but a highly intelligent type of practice supplemented by philosophical education directed to grasp the reasons for these practices. Aristotle explains the nature of the relationship between virtue and habit in terms of an analogy between virtue and the arts. Virtues are seen as sets of skills gradually developed over time through practice. For “it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyre-players are produced.” (*EN*, 1103b7). Later he notes the incompleteness of the analogy, because virtues require a person to be in a certain internal state, while that is not the case in the arts. As it will be discussed in the next section, the arts only require the performance of appropriate actions (1105a27).

Aquinas also understood virtue as habits. He argues that moral virtues are habits of appetite caused by the direction of reason. A virtue is a habit that perfects a power a thing has. We human beings have intellect and appetitive powers, namely, the will, an

⁵ The Greek word ‘hexis’ has been translated in a number of ways in Aristotle’s work, namely, as “habits” in Apostle’s translation, as “states” in Irwin’s translation, as “states of character” in Ross’s translation.

⁶ The other virtues, of the soul as they are called, seem to be somewhat resembling those of the body. They were not in it formerly; they are afterwards produced in it by habits and exercises.

irrational appetite for various physical pleasures, and an irrational appetite for emotions such as anger and fear. We need good habits – i.e. virtues – to dispose us to act in good ways for the sake of ends that are suitable and good for us. Following St. Augustine, Aquinas saw virtue as a habit “by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us.” (S.T. I-II, q. 55, a. 4) It is a necessary condition for virtue that a person performs good acts.

Likewise, Dewey referred to the role of habits as the nature of character. As he puts it, without the “continued operation of all habits in every act, no such thing as character could exist.” (1922: 37) Of course, many habits work simultaneously within any person, what makes Dewey to say that the interaction between habits makes character.

The most extreme position in the understanding of virtues as habits has been postulated by Ryle, who argues that a virtue is identical with a habit (1949: 42). Even if such a view seems exaggerated, we might still see the point here: virtues and habits are both understood as qualities of a person by which she does certain things. Jennifer returns the wallet to the owner. Pablo brushes his teeth every time after he eats. Moreover, the process of acquiring virtues is increasingly reflective. First, a person just does it; then she gets into the habit of doing it; then she understands why she does it and gets better at determining when to do it; then eventually she gets involved in questioning and conversing and reasoning about it. That is consistent with Aristotle’s contention that young people can not be really virtuous. Only a person with a properly formed character will be able to benefit from the abstract study of ethics, because only such a person can

apply universal considerations to particular cases correctly (*NE*, 1095 a1-10, 1095 b1-10, 1103 b5-10, 1141 b14-20).

We can teach a highly intelligent seven-year-old boy to play chess even if he does not like it if, in exchange, I give him candy, as MacIntyre proposes. The boy can cheat out of his desire for candy but there will be a point when the child finds reasons in those special goods “internal to chess”. MacIntyre’s account of virtue relies on the idea of social roles and the attachment of a range of actions entailed by each function. In his view, virtue is a matter of habits that are consistent with authority and tradition and so reflection has a secondary function. Each person is assigned a role which has to be internalized so well that she simply does it without reflecting, like a hockey player who receives a pass in the closing seconds of a game. He does not need to stop and think about what to do, simply because he has internalized the role. MacIntyre’s view downplays the importance of deliberation and reflection emphasized by Aristotle. Although the fully virtuous agent in Aristotle’s sense does not need to stop and deliberate each time he performs an act – because once he has formed a good habit the associated action will often be automatic – the analogy of the player underestimates the significance of critical thinking in the Aristotelian virtues (*EN*, 1105a25).

There are at least four objections against the conception of virtues as habits. Even if they are ontologically similar, there are a number of differences between virtues and habits. First, since virtues involve deliberation, they cannot be habits, which seem to be mindless. One possible reply is that habits need not be simple habits; there may be complex habits. Through training, a person’s behavior can become simultaneously automatic and flexible, such as Pollard’s understanding of habits as different from

reflexes, bodily processes, and compulsions (2003: 415). Admittedly, both virtues and habits are acquired by training. But there may be a way to acquire virtue without training, for example through a Nozickean transformation machine as Zagzebski suggests (1996: 117-119). Such a machine would imaginarily help to overcome *akrasia*, perhaps working as hypnosis does. Still, continence is not virtue.⁷ A second objection to the habit account is that not all habits are virtues. Indeed, according to Aristotle, only those habits that concern passions and actions for which there is an excess, a mean, and a deficiency are virtues. Still, we can accommodate this objection by saying that a virtue is a habit with respect to a mean. But not all means are virtues. Yet, Aristotle does not say that every habit with respect to a mean is a virtue; excess and defects are forms of moral failure not only as a failure to hit a mean but also as a failure to flourish. Hence, we might say that a habit with respect to a mean is a virtue for Aristotle only if failure to hit the mean is a moral failure as well. The third objection, which is related to the understanding of virtues as behavioral dispositions that I shall review below, is that habits are not psychological states; they are just patterns of behavior, they do not have propositional content (Pollard, 2003: 418). Hence, virtues are not habits. Jennifer can return a wallet and Pablo can brush his teeth without the corresponding quality. But while we may think that acting out of character is wrong, there is nothing odd about doing something that a person is not in the habit of doing. Pablo brushed his teeth this morning before breakfast, though he is not in the habit of doing so, and no one would consider that odd. In contrast, it would be at least

⁷ Philosophers have been perplexed about those actions that are contrary to the agent's better judgment, which are called weak-willed. In the Aristotelian tradition, there are states of character that are not as blameworthy as the vices but not as praiseworthy as the virtues. The Greek term for these states of character are *enkrateia* – which is translated as “continence” – and *akrasia* – translated as “incontinence” or “weakness of will.” The incontinent person knows what the right thing to do is but she goes against reason because the emotions to which she gives in. In contrast, the continent person experiences feelings that are contrary to reason but she does nothing wrong (NE, VII.1-10). In chapter three and four, I shall discuss the role and importance of *akrasia* in character-based ethics.

surprising that being as honest as Jennifer believes she is, she fails to return the wallet to the owner and pockets the money she found in the street (in both cases, though, we want to know why).

At the end, an account of the virtues as habits is untenable. Still, there might be a habit-based conception of virtue that is defensible. Such a conception would endorse the idea of understanding virtues as habits with respect to a type of passion/action, where a habit is a mode of feeling that has become routine by becoming easy and familiar. Then, the ease and familiarity create a disposition toward the mode identified with the habit. But then habits would entail dispositions, so that a habit is counted as a virtue only if it can be evaluated by how closely it hits a mean between an excess and a deficiency (where excess and deficiency count as moral failure). The dispositional analysis of habits is equally problematic, as we shall soon see.

2.2.2. Virtues as Abilities

A more interesting claim recovers the ancient idea that virtues are technical skills or abilities, that is, moral techniques that someone learns to develop and exercise in a competent manner. Like virtues, abilities are acquired excellences.⁸ According to this view, our abilities are typically associated with a task. Moral abilities would be, in this version, psychological techniques to control our desires and emotions that prevent them

⁸ Virtues are natural in the sense of being part of the *eudaimonia* at which human nature aims. But virtues are not innate; they are all acquired. Some philosophers conflate intellectual virtues and abilities so denying that virtues are different from natural capacities (Sosa, 1985; Greco, 1993). In some sense, it is a sort of human excellence to have long fingers or good hearing as well as good deductive reasoning. Yet, in the sense in which Aristotle talks about virtue (“none of the virtues of character arises in us naturally...”) (NE, 1103a19-20), it is an acquired trait, developed by training. One important reason for this narrow understanding of virtue has to do with moral responsibility: moral virtues are acquired excellences, those excellences for which we are morally responsible. Someone may reply that natural talents and skills are praised but, as Zagzebski (1996) observes, we do not blame the lack of them. Other virtue ethicists (e.g. Foot, 1978) reaffirm that moral excellences involve the will and resistance to bad motivations in a way that innate capacities do not.

from interfering with our practical judgment. The structure of virtue is, according to Annas (1995), structurally similar to the intellectual structure of a practical skill. This idea rests on the thought that one practical activity, namely, acting well, is like working well (1995: 229).

Von Wright (1963) argues that Aristotle was misled by the Greek language into the belief that virtues are more abilities and skills than they indeed are. Other virtue ethicists deny that Aristotle endorsed the skill model of virtue (Annas, 1995; Bloomfield, 2000).

Some virtues, which make no reference to overt behavior, such as self-respect or sincerity, cannot be understood as skills. But those virtues that are often associated with behavior such as prudence or self-control can. Virtues and skills are different because skills are directed to special activities and virtues are generic and unconnected with any specific activity (von Wright, 1963: 139). That is, skills and abilities are matters of being good at performing some specific activity, but there is no specific activity connected with any virtue. We say that someone is good at performing an act, which is defined in terms of the result of this act, but we do not say that possessing a virtue is being good at performing, say, benevolent actions. Indeed, a virtuous person may occasionally fail to deliver the virtuous action. We can distinguish special from generic abilities in order to accommodate the objection: virtue would constitute a sort of generic ability. Yet, there is another difference between virtues and abilities. Even if we have learned how to perform a skill, we could forget how to perform it on some occasions. However, forgetting does not explain failure to perform the act associated to a virtue (Wallace, 1978: 47). The objection fails. Like the development of abilities, virtues may be lost by a deliberate

decision to stop being honest, caring, etc. And after enough time, it may be quite difficult for a person to start being honest, caring, etc. again, as the literature on how normal people engage in wrongdoing proves (Waller, 2002; Doris, 2002).

Moreover, a person might not be capable of practicing the acts associated with the virtue.⁹ Even if there are differences between virtues and skills, those differences may not be related to forgetting how to practice them. Furthermore, some authors claim that a skill need not be exercised, but a virtue does not exist unless it is exercised on the occasion calling for virtuous behavior (Meilander, 1984; Doris, 2002). In response, I argue that the possession of a virtue does not entail that his or her possessor will always perform the act associated with the virtue.

A final objection to the understanding of virtues as abilities is offered by Aristotle when he says that virtues exercise the will in a way that abilities do not (*NE*, 1140b22-5). We cannot excuse a vicious act by saying that we failed to do it in the same way than we can excuse a poor performance by saying that we failed to do it. Foot (1978) uses the example of someone who deliberately makes a spelling mistake. The fact that it was a deliberate action can lead to exculpation. We do not infer from her mistake that she lacks the skills of a speller. However, lack of virtue cannot be excused on the grounds that the person did it deliberately. As she puts it, “(...) a virtue is not like a skill or an art a mere capacity: it must actually engage the will” (1978: 8). Still, we can accommodate this objection by saying that virtues are sort of special skills – as opposed to general skills – which have a special relation to the will, a relation that makes the virtuous act almost obligatory on each appropriate occasion. Contrary to what Foot believes, one might say

⁹ This begs the question of whether vices involve lack of skills or rather different, conflicting skills, as we discussed in chapter one.

that the agent deliberately engaged in a practice that is not virtuous, say lying, for the sake of an innocent person's life.¹⁰ And one may also say that telling a lie does, at the very least, provide better evidence that one lacks a virtue than does deliberately singing off-key that one is a lousy singer.

We can say that a virtue is similar to an ability, or that it presupposes an ability. But surely the virtue of, say, truthfulness encompasses more than the ability to tell the truth. For in the same way an honest person may lie for the sake of an innocent's life, even a very dishonest person can tell the truth if she wishes. Furthermore, while the exercise of a skill is not necessarily associated with anything valuable, the possession and exercise of a virtue is itself intrinsically valuable. Skills may be valuable, but only for features of the situations in which they are used, such as having a good serve is useful in tennis and having a not-too-short fourth finger is necessary to excel in playing the violin.

Finally, virtues will typically be associated with one or more skills. For example, the agent knows how to stand up to a physical threat (skill), which is associated with the virtue of courage. There are numerous connections between skills and virtues. One may say that the possession of some correlative skills is necessary for the very possession of the related virtue, because these skills allow the possessor to be effective in delivering a virtuous action. But it appears that virtues have psychological priority over skills or abilities because of the will component of virtue. This leads us to the treatment of virtues as dispositions, which is the central concern of this section.

¹⁰ But Augustinians and Kantians would say lying to a would-be murderer about the whereabouts of the innocent victim he intends to kill is morally wrong.

2.2.3. Virtues as Behavioral Dispositions

According to a popular view, virtues as well as habits and skills are all dispositions to behave according to the right rules. Virtues are dispositions that produce ethically appropriate conduct.

There are several versions of the dispositional view, depending on how broad the notion of disposition in use is. I shall argue against the version that postulates virtues as Rylean dispositions, a view henceforth called the ‘reductive account’ of virtues.¹¹

As Kagan defines it:

“A character trait is a disposition to act in certain ways (for example, to tell the truth, to smile when embarrassed, to help those in need, or to run away from danger).” (1998: 205).

The dispositional view holds a linear conception of virtue, where a virtue is a single linear trait that bears a direct correspondence with certain behavior in any situation where such a behavior is required (by moral rules or principles). Whether a trait is indeed a virtue or a vice is determined by the moral principle or rule that judge the quality of the action associated with that trait. For example, the virtue of honesty can be reduced, according to the reductive view, to a disposition to obey the moral principle that forbids – among other things – to tell lies or intentionally deceive others. Likewise, the virtue of benevolence is fundamentally a disposition to perform actions that fulfill the duty of

¹¹ My target is the view that virtues are merely dispositions in the sense that goes with full analysis in terms of if-then statements. Someone may say that to call a virtue a disposition may be just to contrast the relevant properties with occurrences. In that weak sense, virtues may be dispositional but that is not the sense of virtue that we have in mind and it is not the sense in which we colloquially speak about virtue. However, we could understand the claim that virtues involve dispositions without implying that a dispositional analysis is possible. My argument entails that some irreducibly categorical statements are implied by virtue ascriptions, though we may resist the usual distinction between categorical and dispositional properties (see Mumford, 1998; Fara, 2005).

beneficence. In summation, the reductive view defends the claim that “to have a moral virtue is to be disposed to act as moral rules direct” (Gewirth, 1978: 339).

The concept of dispositions has always been of interest to philosophers. Ryle claims that to possess a dispositional property is “not to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change; it is to be bound or liable to be in a particular state, or undergo a particular change, when a particular condition is realized” (1949: 43). So, Ryle explains, a glass has a brittle disposition even if it is not broken into pieces at a given moment. And a person can have the disposition to smoke, even if he is not smoking at a particular moment.

Almost every area of philosophical inquiry has made appeals to dispositions one way or the other. Our interest is the dispositional analysis of mental states. The philosophy of mind went through a phase in which it was common to reduce mental entities to dispositions, even when it was implausible (e.g. Norman Malcolm’s work on dreams).

We say that a wineglass has a disposition to smash when dropped, which means that such a disposition has to do with the possibility of glass’ smashing in certain conditions. Likewise, I have a disposition to burst into tears when I listen to Wunderlich singing Lenski’s aria from Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*. Dispositions – unlike categorical properties – entail subjunctive conditionals. The fragility – a dispositional property – of the wineglass requires that the glass would smash if it were knocked. A number of philosophers – e.g. Carnap, 1936; Ryle, 1949; Quine, 1960; Mackie, 1973; Armstrong, Martin & Place, 1996 – have endorsed the view that an object has a certain disposition if and only if the object would produce the associated manifestation if it were

under the conditions of manifestation. The traditional, Rylean understanding of disposition ascriptions in terms of conditionals can be expressed as follows:

An object is disposed to B when C IFF it would B if it were the case that C

According to this approach, a disposition is an entirely hypothetical property that makes indispensable references to counterfactual states of affairs (Mellor, 1974; Prior, 1985). Since conditionals may or may not be realized, ascriptions of dispositions do not have much to do with actual outcomes.

There are some difficulties. First, there is something wrong with objects differing from each other merely on the dimension of possible behavior. Second, this view is open to a number of fatal counterexamples such as some dispositions that are “finkish” (Martin, 1957), true conditionals that “mimick” a corresponding dispositional ascription (Smith, 1977), true dispositions ascriptions whose associated conditional is false because the disposition is not removed but masked (Johnson, 1992), and “antidotes” which block the disposition’s manifestations (Bird, 1998).

To deal with these objections, Lewis (1997) accepts the mere fact that a wineglass would shatter if it were struck is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for its being disposed to break when hit. The object must have an intrinsic property that, under proper conditions such as the object being struck, would cause the object to break. Although Lewis’ proposal can deal with some counterexamples such as mimicking, it is not successful in dealing with problems of masking and antidotes. Other authors have provided a non-reductive explanation of dispositions (Bird, 1998; Molnar, 1999). Others advocate a non-conditional analysis of disposition ascriptions (Fara, 2005), which expresses some sort of generalization about the object’s behavior that tolerates

exceptions. According to that view, ascribing a disposition to an object is not merely expressing a habitual claim about that object. For habitual claims can be true “by accident” but disposition ascriptions cannot. Fara (2006) agrees with Lewis and suggests that saying that an object does something in virtue of one of its intrinsic properties is to say that the object’s possession of such a property “partially explains why the object does so-and-so.”

Now, is having the intrinsic property among the causes of the disposition’s manifestation when this manifestation occurs? When we say that virtue is a habit or an ability, and we understand habits and abilities as dispositional properties, we either say:

- (A) a dispositional property is correctly ascribed to someone or something only if a set of subjunctive conditionals is true; or
- (B) a dispositional property is indeed reducible to other, actual, non-dispositional properties which together with other laws provide the ground for the object/person’s behavior.

In both cases, a dispositional analysis of virtue entails that we are more concerned with the person’s behavior than with her state of character. For in (A) we say that a person is entitled to the ascription of a virtue if and only if certain behaviors ensue. And in (B), dispositional properties are reduced to other non-dispositional properties which explain – in conjunction with some external laws – behavior. In a theory of virtue which takes character seriously virtue is an actual quality (a state of a person, as I shall discuss in the next section) which has a fundamental value and which is not reducible to overt behavior.

2.2.4. The Conceptualization of Virtue in the Social Sciences

Social scientists are generally sympathetic to the reductive view, presumably because the conceptualization of virtues as behavioral dispositions makes their job easier in terms of operationalizing virtue and character traits.

In fact, many personality psychologists can be said to understand virtues as behavioral dispositions in that they are more focused on classifying behavior than in theorizing about mental states, as we will discuss in chapter three. There is extensive research on classificatory scheme in personality psychology (Cattell, 1946; Eysenck, 1991; Costa and McCrae, 1985), which attempts to identify a minimum number of dimensions along which people differs by using techniques of factor analysis of questionnaire data (rather than using a priori conceptualization).

Like personality psychologists, positive psychologists define virtues and strengths in behavioral terms (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). For example, Peterson and Seligman define character strengths as “the psychological ingredients – process or mechanisms – that define the virtues” or “distinguishable routes to display one or another of the virtues” (2004:13). To illustrate this claim, they argue that the virtue of wisdom can be achieved through such strengths as creativity, curiosity, love of learning, open mindedness.

Peterson and Seligman stipulate that a character strength must meet certain criteria to be considered a virtue.¹² The following five criteria are pertinent to the purpose of this chapter:

¹² The authors make clear that these criteria are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for character strengths but rather pertinent features that synthesize a “family resemblance” (Peterson and Seligman, 2004: 17)

- i. Character strengths are like personal traits (Allport, 1961) that a person owns, celebrates, and frequently exercises.¹³
- ii. “each strength is morally valued in its own right, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes,”
- iii. “the display of a strength by one person does not diminish other people in the vicinity,”
- iv. “a strength needs to be manifest in the range of an individual's behavior – thoughts, feelings, and/or actions – in such a way that it can be assessed. It should be trait-like in the sense of having a degree of generality across situations and stability across time.”
- v. another criterion for a character strength is that people differ in their strengths

Business scholars working on the Positive Organizational Scholarship tradition (POS) also endorse the dispositional analysis of character strengths and virtues. POS basically adopts the positive psychology’s framework, so the nature of virtue is roughly defined in behavioral terms. For example, the commendable work on the virtue of courage in the POS tradition (Worline and Quinn, 2002; Worline, 2002) is primarily concerned with courageous behavior and implicitly conceptualizes the virtue of courage as a disposition to act following a principle of courage (which would go along the lines of

¹³ Peterson and Seligman call them “signature strengths” and argue that they meet the following criteria:

- “A sense of ownership and authenticity (“this is the real me”) vis-à-vis the strength.
- A feeling of excitement while displaying it, particularly at first.
- A rapid learning curve as themes are attached to the strength and practiced.
- Continuous learning of new ways to enact the strength.
- A sense of yearning to act in accordance with the strength.
- A feeling of inevitability in using the strength, as if one cannot be stopped or dissuaded from its display.
- The discovery of the strength as owned in an epiphany.
- Invigoration rather than exhaustion in using the strength.
- The creation and pursuit of fundamental projects that revolve around the strength.
- Intrinsic motivation to use the strength.” (2004: 18)

overcoming fear and voluntarily engaging in worthy action). In their words, “the effectiveness of each organizational form may only be viable over the long term if participants exercise the courage necessary to act from principle.” (Worline and Quinn, 2003: 157). In the same vein, POS research on the virtue of compassion in the workplace is defined as “an expression of an innate human instinct to respond to the suffering of others” (Dutton, Worline, Frost and Lilius, 2006: 60) and POS research on the virtue of gratitude relies on the assumption that gratitude is a behavioral disposition to behave according to a principle of expressing thanks for the benefits one has received. As Emmons puts it, “being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen... in psychological parlance, gratitude is the positive recognition of benefits received.” (2003: 82).¹⁴

2.2.5. What is Wrong with Reduction?

Taking into account the preceding considerations, I argue that there are four decisive objections against the reductive (or dispositional) account of virtue.

First, the reductive account has weak explanatory power and hence, virtue attribution does not provide good explanations of behavior. It provides a linear model of virtue. Consider the virtue of honesty. According to the reductive account, honesty is a disposition to act in accordance to the duty of honesty. The duty of honesty is associated, among other things, to always tell the truth. So, the possessor of the virtue of honesty unfailingly behaves in a certain matter, for example, telling the truth and not intentionally

¹⁴ In contrast to the virtue ethics literature, in both positive psychology and the POS tradition there is very little recognition here that my having a virtue is good for the community. This may not be because a virtue is good for the community but rather because psychologists may not be very enthusiastic about that kind of language.

deceiving others. You either told the truth or you lied. If you told the truth that is a behavioral manifestation of the virtue of honesty. If you did not, that is an indication that you lack the virtue of honesty. Some may even say this is a manifestation of your dishonesty, that is, a vice. Now, suppose that I am in Germany before World War II and a Nazi official comes to my door and inquires whether I have seen a Jew who has escaped. As defined by the reductive account, the virtue of honesty would call for telling the truth while the virtue of compassion would command to lie. If two or more virtues conflict in a situation, behavior may appear inconsistent but that is just the illusion of assessing behavior with reference to one single trait. Thus, the reductive account does not have much to say about the interaction of more than one disposition. Under the reductive model, to attribute a virtue means to place an individual on a ranking according to how much trait relevant behavior the individual exhibits. But human beings are more complex than the dispositional account suggests; they have multiple dispositions that might lead to conflicting courses of action. Two different traits, thought as internal individual differences, may come into conflict in a particular situation. A number of different character traits may be associated with a particular behavior. Conversely, a single virtue may lead to different behaviors; for example, the virtue of integrity may regularly lead to truth telling but in other cases may lead to lie.

Second, a dispositional account of virtue does not have much to say about the interaction of traits and other mental states relating to behavior. If a belief is a tendency to do a certain action given a certain desire, and a desire is a tendency to do a certain action given a certain belief, a dispositional account does not provide a good answer for why a person did not perform such an action – at least in the absence of self-reports by

the agent – given her desire to perform that action and her beliefs that such actions lead to the desired outcomes. To illustrate this claim, consider the case of Angela. If a belief is a tendency to do X given a certain desire, and a desire is a tendency to do X given a certain belief, then, if Angela does not do X, one may wonder why she does not. The commonsense solution – that Angela can tell us what she wants and what she believes – is unattractive to the social scientist who does not countenance non-dispositional inner states reportable by the agent.¹⁵

Third, a dispositional account of virtue does not supply a good theory to deal with cases of virtue without behavior. Specifically, a dispositional account of virtue is question-begging when it comes to assess virtues in the absence of behavioral manifestations associated to the virtue. Aristotle maintains that “(...) it seems possible for someone to possess virtue but be asleep or inactive throughout his life...” (*NE*, I, V, 1095b34-1096a2). Yet, some philosophers and psychologists believe it is contradictory to affirm that a person has a certain character trait X but has never behaved in an X-like manner (Alston, 1970; Doris, 2002). It may not be contradictory after all to possess a trait which has never been manifested in behavior. A number of counterexamples, notably the case of Phineas P. Gage extensively discussed in the writings of neurobiologist Antonio Damasio (1994) support the objection. Consider my father’s behavior. Two years ago he found a wallet full of money in the street. He returned it to the owner, and that behavior is consistent with the kind of person I always thought my father to be. But

¹⁵ On the issue of reportability, Ryle and others argued that mental states were not reportable. But the very concept of reportability is a slippery notion. Ryle set the bar high and then claimed that our reports must often fall short. In any case, while virtues would be dispositional according to this view, desires might be considered occurrent states because they are reportable (and virtues are not). What we report concerning a mental event will depend in part on what else we know. It is possible in theory to report brain states; we just do not know enough about the brain to do so. But surely I can report that I am inclined or disposed to perform some action.

the fact that he was never in a situation like that in 63 years –he had never found out one before – cannot help to establish whether he was the kind of person who may return a wallet. Virtue is not just behavior but rather something that underlies behavior (Dent, 1984). Even if it were possible to infer a person’s character from a single action, that cannot be handled by a theory in which virtues are merely statistical measures of past behavior. George might believe that action M would lead to T but he does not perform action M because George does not want T. Or maybe George wants T but does not believe that doing M will bring it about. As personality psychologists suggest, we can get additional evidence by asking George, by asking his peers, or by looking at his further actions. George might or might not embrace T if it happens some other way. Hence, it is not trivial to say that George did M because he wanted T and believed that M would bring T about. Yet, on the reductive account of virtues, the statement that a desire caused some behavior is not very informative, since a desire to do M is just a disposition to do M. And, again, a dispositionalist analysis of this sort has no theory to explain George’s desire to do M coupled with his not doing M.

Finally, the fourth objection to the reductive account holds that if virtues are understood as behavioral dispositions and moral character is reduced to dispositions to follow the moral rules or comply with certain principles, then we do not need any talk of moral character. Consider again Kagan’s conceptualization of virtue:

“Identifying the relevant disposition to act is often central to giving an account of a given character trait. Thus, we can say that honesty is (at its central core) a disposition to refrain from lying and deceit, trustworthiness involves (among other things) a disposition to keep one’s promises, generosity is a disposition to bestow benefits, and so forth.” (1998: 206)

If morality is concerned primarily with right and wrong conduct, with good and bad behavior, and with how persons ought to act, then character has a derivative role in moral theory. What we need in business ethics – according to the reductive view – is to find and justify the right rules and moral principles. And the moral virtues would have, at most, merely, an instrumental value. If virtues are just behavioral dispositions, the language of virtue becomes empty. For even the most dishonest person could perform an honest action – for the sake of a reward, for example – and even the least courageous agent could perform an act of courage – to impress bystanders, for instance. If the agent’s motives in obeying the moral rule are irrelevant to whether the agent has fulfilled its requirements, then it follows that we do not need to talk about virtues at all: we already have a language of rightness and goodness, which are – according to the reductive view – the central concepts in ethics. But it was precisely as a response to the view that only rightness and goodness matter in morality that the contemporary virtue ethics tradition was developed, as it was explained in chapter one. I shall develop this argument in section Three.¹⁶

Even if it is possible for the reductive account to accommodate some of these objections, when taken together, the four preceding objections are overwhelming.¹⁷

¹⁶ Another concern is whether there should be a dispositional analysis of virtues if there is not also of thoughts, desires, emotions, etc. Rylean behaviorists would probably say that there should be dispositional analyses of all of these mental states and that that is the only kind of analysis there can be. Ed Hartman finds the explanation of why so many authors frame the notion of virtues in terms of dispositions in some philosophers’ desires to reduce virtues away and so make things less complicated for their theories. They are comfortable with the virtues having weak explanatory power, so that they do not have to be bothered discussing them.

¹⁷ Another concern is the circularity issue that I shall discuss in chapter three. If we say (1) that a person possesses X virtue IFF she behaves in a certain characteristic way; and (2) a certain action is a virtuous action IFF it is the sort of action a virtuous person would perform; then propositions (1) and (2) may be circular.

2.3. WHAT VIRTUE IS: THE ANATOMY OF CHARACTER

Now, if a dispositional account of the virtues is problematic and incompatible with the virtue ethics project, the next question is how a non-reductive account of the virtues would look.

There are, I submit, two main ways to respond to the question while preserving the integrity of the virtue project and the language of character. We may expand the understanding of disposition. Or, we may get rid of them in the conceptualization of virtue.

Regarding the first strategy, one may keep the view of virtues as dispositions, while broadening the concept of disposition. The alternative to the reductive view favored by Hursthouse is a multi-track dispositional view. Virtues are dispositions but they are, the argument goes, not single-track but multi-track dispositions. That is, dispositions to feel, to perceive, to desire, to believe, and to act (Hursthouse, 2007). The multi-track view can still be objected as reductive, though the set of hypothetical would be more complex. Alternatively, one may follow Sellars (1997) and define dispositions as postulates of a theory that explains behavior, including verbal behavior, which is consistent with the existence of conflicting dispositions.

The second strategy is the one I favor. I propose a non-reductive definition of moral virtues – the trait account of virtue – which conceptualizes virtues as states of character. They include those character traits that are objects of choice and worthy of admiration, for which we are held morally responsible.

Accordingly, virtues are defined as character traits. Traits are not dispositions in this account.¹⁸ Character is the mental architecture that makes the possession of the virtues possible. Let me briefly sketch the anatomy of character.

Roughly, character is a person's collection of higher-order and first-order desires, values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that have any bearing on moral matters.¹⁹ A person of good character has the right sort of ends (ends that are fine and contribute to eudaimonia), good deliberation about the means to her ends, and emotions that are appropriate to the situation and thus the right source of motivation.

To define a virtue as a state of character is to indicate that part of what we mean by virtue is that it is something stable and deep-seated. We understand virtue to be something enduring, as opposed to momentary feelings, thoughts, and actions, which are insufficient to characterize the psychological apparatus of virtue. A trait of character is not an event; it persists over time and it does not entail change. That does not mean that a trait is static. But ascribing a virtue entails some degree of stability and consistency. The explanatory power of virtue ascription depends largely on that of sets of desires and beliefs that are elements in the trait in question. The degree of explanatory or descriptive power of virtue attributions is the subject matter of chapters three and four. But I

¹⁸ This is against the standard view of traits both in psychology and philosophy, according to which traits are dispositional properties. But I am not alone. Hampshire (1953) argues that character traits should not be considered as dispositions because they are unlike the chemical examples of dispositional properties (though I disagree with Hampshire in his view that the only function of trait attribution is to categorize the agent's past behavior). Wright (1963) also resists a dispositional account, though for different reasons, namely, because virtues, unlike dispositions, are not associated with clearly demarcated categories of manifestations.

¹⁹ Usage of 'higher-order desires' in this chapter contains both second-order desire and what Frankfurt defines as second-order volitions (Frankfurt, 1971). First order-desires are desires directed at an object or an act. Or, to put it in a different way, a first order desire is a desire whose object is something other than to have or to lack a desire. Second-order desires are desires directed at desires. So if I desire not to fulfill my desire for junk food, this is a second order desire, since it is directed at another desire. Second-order volition is a second order desire to act on a first order desire.

anticipate that I do not think traits have no explanatory power at all as Doris (2002) and Harman (1999) suggest.

Then, to have a strong character involves the possession of a capacity to entertain higher-order thoughts about thoughts (beliefs) that enable the agent to reflect on, and to alter, her own beliefs and patterns of reasoning. A virtuous person will consider what highest-order desires, values, and beliefs should govern her life. Within limits, she can cultivate certain higher-order desires – such as the desire to enjoy opera – and free herself from other higher-order desires – such as the desire to eat unhealthy food. These desires being not merely to have or to be without certain first-order desires but desires that one or another of her first-order desires should be effective, in the sense of ordering action. She will also develop values and cultivate adherence to certain principles by reflection and disciplined habituation. Possessing a value entails wanting to possess certain kinds of desire. If I value ‘honesty,’ for example, that entails that I want to be the sort of person who really wants to return the wallet I found in the street to the owner, even if the wallet is full of money that I badly need. I do not want to be just someone who merely acknowledges a duty to return the wallet. And to have a strong character is also a matter of cultivating the appropriate emotions: I will feel good rather than angry about giving the wallet back. Admittedly, even a person of strong character will be influenced by the environment, in our case, the organization or the workplace. But a virtuous person will perceive situations correctly; she will grasp the morally salient features of the environment, that is, whether a particular act is a lie or not. Thus, she will be simultaneously describing and evaluating. For her perception involves an understanding on the ethical quality of the action. And she will be responsible for framing the situation

properly. This is what I call framing capacities here; the ability to perceive the essential moral features of a situation.²⁰ Consequently, good character is also a matter of rationality. Virtue is a kind of knowledge, as it was in Socrates. Practical wisdom is the understanding that enables the virtuous person to act well, for the appropriate reasons and out of the right motives. It is precisely that knowledge that provides the resources for a correct situational appreciation. Ultimately, even children can acquire and possess good dispositions, but we would not call them virtuous, because they lack practical wisdom. Children lack what is needed to recognize which features of the situation are more ethically relevant than others. They lack the understanding of what is truly worthwhile (*EN*, 1095 a1-10, 1095 b1-10, 1103 b5-10, 1141 b14-20).

To reprise: character is a person's collection of higher-order and first-order desires, values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that have any bearing on moral matters. These elements of character are not reducible to each other. Although they are interrelated, none of them can be described solely in terms of one of the others. They cannot be reduced to dispositions to behave according to certain principles or rules. None of these is the single fundamental building block of character. Any theory that describes character in terms of only one of these components would be incomplete. This account is non-reductive because, again, the elements of character are not reducible to each other.²¹

²⁰ The notion of framing capacities is close to the concept of moral imagination that Werhane (1999) has promoted in the business ethics literature.

²¹ We can distinguish two senses of reduction here. First, there is a reduction of virtues to behavioral dispositions. Second, there is the reduction of the seven elements of character to each other. Whereas the inappropriateness of the first sort of reduction is easy to defend, the second may not. However, my claim regarding the second sort of reduction is that desires, beliefs, emotions, and framing capacities cannot be reduced to patterns of behavior. I am indebted to Doug Husak for pressing this point.

2.4. A CASE FOR THE NON-REDUCTIVE ACCOUNT

At the end, it might be that a similar catalog of virtues will stem from both the reductive and non-reductive accounts. Then, the very same character traits would emerge as virtues regardless of which conceptualization of virtue we defend. If so, why bother?

The difference between these accounts is, I submit, crucial, in terms of the normative force that virtues are taken to have in normative theory, even if it does not matter with reference to the list of virtues advocated by each account. The fundamental difference between the reductive and non-reductive account of virtues resides in the role of character in understanding the virtues and the primacy of character in normative ethics. The difference reflects the distinction between virtue ethics and virtue theory (and, ultimately, between virtue ethics and modern moral theories) that was introduced in chapter one. Let me elaborate on these reasons.

We can explain why social scientists are inclined to embrace the reductive account of virtue on methodological grounds. After all, the characterization of the virtues as behavioral dispositions makes virtues more easily operationalizable. That is, some degree of reduction may be justifiable for the social scientist conducting empirical studies.²² Ideally, those measures should not end up diluting the normative content of

²² It is noteworthy that this account goes against the standard view in management scholarship that all concepts must be operationalized. This is a holdover from positivism, as Trevino and Weaver (1996) suggest. Do we really need to operationalize any psychological concepts? The big underlying distinction here is between logical relations and causal relations. Behaviorists and other dispositionalists countenance the former, virtue ethicists the latter. Behaviorism was the standard view in the philosophy of mind for many years. It was acceptable to say that an intention to do X cannot be the cause of action X because the relationship between them is not causal but logical. Sellars and others argued that mental states and events are causes and that we postulate them to explain behavior much as we postulate possibly unobservable states and events to explain observable ones (or other unobservable ones, for that matter). Extreme positivists would not have accepted this position, since they held that all explanation should be limited to what is observable, and of course measurable. Organizational scholars still influenced by behaviorism may recommend ignoring all talk of mental events, and with more reason, all talk of virtues, because such entities are just so difficult to operationalize. Of course one might reply that observability itself is not a straightforward concept. The distinction between logical and causal relations merits a dissertation in itself,

virtue. Social scientists may have another concern. They may be said to be justified in adopting the reductive account because a non-reductive theory of virtue that emphasizes the inner dimension of character over the behavioral dimension becomes empirically unfalsifiable (Popper, 1959; Mischel, 1968). And if such theory of virtue lacks empirically testable hypothesis, so the argument goes, it will fail to meet the requirement of psychological realism, which any plausible moral theory must meet, as I argue in chapter one. The argument is untenable, though. For that is not the sense in which I have defended the requirement of psychological realism as a moral constraint in chapter one. And the theory of virtue I aim to develop is not a plain empirical theory solely concerned with the study of the antecedents and outcomes of virtue. Moreover, psychological realism is not a goal in its own right. It is just a constraint on moral theories. Hence, it would be a mistake to judge the plausibility of a normative theory only on the basis of how psychologically realistic it is. Psychological realism is a necessary but not a sufficient test. And insofar as we humans can attain the virtues postulated by the theory, any charge of psychological unrealism is misplaced. That virtue is rare does not necessarily pose a problem on my theory. Unless it is impossible. Plus, there is a way to argue that virtues explain behavior even if we are unable in any one episode to establish which virtue – if any – is active.

In any event, whereas it may make sense for psychologists to define virtues as behavioral dispositions for reasons of “methodological convenience,” philosophers

so I am limiting these remarks to a footnote. Empirically oriented business ethicists may use a sort of pseudo-concept as an approximation of virtue. So, if we want to test whether gratitude makes employees more loyal we would find an operational definition of each of the two concepts, and the results would probably let us infer something about the relationship between those approximations. But that would be an approximation; psychology is not a science, as Davidson (1980) famously argued. Presumably there are covering laws linking psychological entities with actions and words, but they are not couched in the language that we normally use to refer to psychological entities.

endorsing the reductive account probably have something else in mind. Utilitarians and Kantians, as well as virtue consequentialism and deontological theories of virtue, may have different reasons for understanding virtues as behavioral dispositions. The reductive account fits well with a theory in which principles and rules are primary while character has a secondary role. In other words, a dispositional analysis of virtues is favored by those enrolled in mainstream moral theory, virtue consequentialism, and virtue deontology, because it is suitable for their theories, which reject the primacy of character in normative ethics (Thomson, 1997; Harman, 2005; Hurka, 2006). Conversely, they might reject virtue ethics because they understand that virtues are nothing but dispositions. Both views are complementary.

Unlike many of his colleagues, Harman explicitly defends this thesis:

“It is worth mentioning that there are variants of virtue ethics that do not require character traits in the ordinary sense. For example, Thomson (1996) tries to explicate moral thinking by appeal to judgments about whether particular actions are just or courageous or whatever. To the extent that such judgments are concerned entirely with the action and not with any presumed underlying trait of character, Thomson’s enterprise is unaffected by my discussion.” (1999: 327-328)

The answer to the starting question of this section is that the difference between reductive and non-reductive virtues is a continuity of the distinction between virtue theories and virtue ethics. While Aristotelian virtues entail the expression of fine inner states – i.e. practical wisdom is necessary for all virtues and a firm disposition of relevant fine feelings and emotions is necessary as well – this requirement is not part of the reductive definition of virtue in virtue theories. For virtue consequentialists, virtues are “character traits which produce good effects” (Driver, 1996: 124). Deontologists also embrace a dispositional analysis of the virtues. Notably, Frankena argues that virtues

involve a “tendency to do certain kinds of actions in certain kinds of situations, not just to think or feel in certain ways.” (1973: 63) Likewise, Gert defends the view that “moral virtues are dispositions to avoid unjustified violations of the moral rules” and that “to have a moral vice is to have a disposition to unjustifiably violate a moral rule.” (2005: 184). And Gewirth argues that, “to have a moral virtue is to be disposed to act as moral rules direct.” (1985: 351). Finally, Rawls maintains that once the principles of right and justice are on hand, they are what should be used to define moral virtues (1971: 436). Virtues are, Rawls claims, “related families of dispositions and propensities regulated by a higher-order desire, in this case a desire to act from the corresponding moral principles.” (1971: 192). In contrast, under the non-reductive account, a virtue is not merely a disposition to perform right acts. For an action to be from a state of character – i.e. for an action to be expressive of virtue – it must be expressive of appropriate inner states.

What is distinctive about virtue ethics, as opposed to Kantian and consequentialist theories of virtue, is its account of the nature of virtue, which takes character seriously. For a virtue ethicist, a virtuous person has a standing commitment to acting from virtue, such as the consequentialist has a standing commitment to leading an objectively consequentialist life and a Kantian has a standing commitment to perform her duty. As Audi puts it, a distinguishing feature of virtue ethics is that “the basic normative aims of moral agents are aretaically determined... by the requirements of acting from virtue as opposed, say, to being dictated by a commitment to following certain deontic rules.” (Audi, 1997: 186)

Following Nussbaum (1999) and Hurka (2006), someone may argue that sophisticated Kantianism and sophisticated consequentialism share with virtue ethics the view that a virtuous agent has as a foreground motivation a desire to, say, help a friend for her own sake. Yet, such a foreground desire to help a friend for her own sake is not identical with a background desire to be virtuous for its own sake. Hence, an advocate of the non-reductive account concludes, virtuous behavior expresses a virtue if and only if it expresses appropriate inner states, among them, a background motivation to act from virtue (as opposed to a background motivation of acting according to the Categorical Imperative).

In sum, a fundamental challenge to virtue ethics is the challenge over the primacy of character presented by a dispositional analysis of the virtues, which holds that virtues are exhaustively as well as exclusively defined in terms of dispositions to act in accordance with rules or principles of action. In that view, moral theorists should be simply concerned with getting the moral principles of action properly codified, rather than a concern with character development and moral education.

Two clarifications are in order. First, even if the only way to establish the state of character of a person is through observations of her behavior under the proper circumstances, it does not follow that a dispositional analysis is called for. It does not follow that an agent's virtue is a summary of his virtuous behavior either. Granted, behavior is evidence for the agent's internal state but that does not make the internal state a behavioral disposition. We should not confuse the two. Second, one may wonder whether a non-characterological construction must necessarily be a dispositional one. It need not be. For both deontological and consequentialist theories do not need a

dispositional construct to postulate the priority of rules and principles and the primacy of act evaluation over character evaluation. Utilitarian and Kantian theory as well as virtue theories – deontological theories of virtue and virtue consequentialism – agree in the primacy of rules and principles over character. But only those who advocate some version of virtue theories that are not character-based have reasons to develop a dispositional construction.

2.5. NON-DISPOSITIONAL VIRTUES

Thus far I have provided a rationale for the difference between reductive and non-reductive analysis of virtue with reference to normative ethics. In practical terms, how does the reductive view differ from a non-reductive approach to virtue? How much, if at all, would empirical studies on virtue and character strengths – the sort of studies conducted by positive psychologists – change under a non-dispositional analysis of virtue?

In this section, I will illustrate the differences by discussing two examples of virtues, one of which is treated as a character strength in the positive psychology and POS literature – the virtue or character strength of gratitude – and other which is surprisingly absent from the positive psychology and POS inventories of virtue, namely the virtue of self-respect. Both gratitude and self-respect have a good philosophical pedigree in the philosophical literature on the virtues.

2.5.1. Gratitude

Let us start with gratitude. According to the “Values in Action Inventory of Strengths” (VIA) developed by positive psychologists, gratitude is defined as “Being

aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.”

(Peterson and Seligman, 2004: 30). First of all, it is surprising that positive psychologists have listed gratitude under the strength of transcendence – which is defined as the strength that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning – rather than under the strength of humanity “Interpersonal strength that involve tending and befriending others”.

Now, if one follows the reductive strategy, one would say that the virtue (or character strength) of gratitude is a disposition to follow a rule of conduct, which would go along the lines of a duty of gratitude. According to that view, the duty of gratitude requires, among other things, that anytime one receives some benefit or gift, one ought to recognize those benefits received and express gratefulness (Emmons, 2003: 82). Then, the virtue of gratitude would be a disposition to obey the moral duty of gratitude.

It is evident that the reductive approach fails to describe the virtue of gratitude in the way that virtue theorists have defined gratitude. And it fails to define gratitude in the way we colloquially speak of gratitude. For even if it is true that a malevolent person may perform an act of benevolence and a coward may perform a courageous act, in the case of gratitude it seems that the very notion of gratitude relies on the inner component of virtue. What constitutes an act of gratitude is indeed the motive from which it is done, that is, the higher-order and first-order desires and values of the person, her beliefs, her emotions, and, to some extent, her behavior. In other words, in order to perform an act of gratitude, one must be grateful! It is not enough to perform the behavior that is required by a duty of gratitude. Such a duty cannot serve as a substitute motive without significantly altering the nature of the act of gratitude. Even if we agree that an act of

insincere gratitude is better than manifesting no gratitude at all – and the case needs to be made for that claim anyway – the existence of a duty (or a rule) to act as if one is grateful fails to capture the essence of the virtue of gratitude. Consequently, a duty or principle of gratitude is not going to do the work; in order to perform an act of gratitude a person needs to be grateful, a person need to possess the virtue of gratitude.

For the aforementioned reasons, the reductive account of virtue is blind to the mental states that underlie an act of gratitude. Consequently, the view that the virtue of gratitude is simply a behavioral disposition to behave according to a principle of gratitude is inadequate. The virtue of gratitude involves not only saying the words ‘thank you’ but also fine inner states, including beliefs, desires, and attitudes towards one’s benefactor. Ultimately, gratitude is much more than conduct and may not lead – at least sometimes – to any external manifestation of the trait. A person may be simply grateful without expressing thanks, without any requirement of further action as it would be demanded in the reductive account.

2.5.2. Self-Respect

Self-respect – as well as self-esteem – is surprisingly absent from the VIA inventory. Given that it is a morally desirable and proper affirmation of one’s moral character, which is linked to happiness and flourishing (Martin, 2006), one would have expected positive psychologists to include it as a character strength. Furthermore, it is a central virtue in Western democracies. But it is not treated as a character strength in the positive psychology and POS literature. Yet, it is a good illustration of another virtue that does not conform to a dispositional analysis of virtue.

Under the account I have been defending in this chapter, self-respect involves a constellation of attitudes, beliefs, desires, commitments, expectations, emotions, and actions that express and constitute one's sense of one's worth, including a recognition and understanding of one's worth and a desire to protect it and preserve it. I can respect myself as a person, as when I stand up for my rights, or in a specific capacity, as when I adopt the code of ethics associated with my profession.

Self-respect figures most prominently in the work of Kant, who claims that persons have a duty to respect themselves. For Kant, the requirement that we respect ourselves consists not only in a duty to regard ourselves as having the same moral standing as others, but also in a collection of duties requiring us to value our autonomy and rational agency and to treat ourselves in accordance with our special moral status.

According to the reductive strategy, the virtue of self-respect is a disposition to fulfill the duty of self-respect. And the duty of self-respect requires that one values and treats oneself as an end in itself. Then, even a person who has the opposite trait – disrespect or servility – could perform the actions required by the principle of self-respect.

As in the case of gratitude, this conclusion is unwarranted. Self-respect (and lack of it) is fundamentally a matter of attitude and beliefs; it does not have much to do with behavior. An action counts as an expression of self-respect (or as an expression of servitude) depending on the beliefs and attitudes of the agent.

Consequently, the reductive view entails an inadequate strategy to deal with the virtue of self-respect. Neither the virtue of gratitude nor the virtue of self-respect conforms to a dispositional analysis because we cannot make a sharp distinction between

inner and outer states. In the same way that an act of gratitude is characteristically defined as an action motivated by the virtue of gratitude, an act of self-respect is one which is done from the virtue of self-respect and cannot be performed from a sense of duty without significantly altering the nature of the action.

To conclude, there is no meaningful way to formulate a duty or principle of self-respect to reduce the virtue of self-respect to a behavioral disposition to obey such a principle or duty. Hence, the virtue of self-respect has – like the virtue of gratitude – a fundamental inner component – beliefs, attitudes, desires about one’s worth as a human being – that is irreducible to a disposition to act in accordance with moral rules and principles.

2.6. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I aimed to respond to the question of what virtue is, in connection with the moral and psychological status of character in normative theory. I have argued that there are two basic strategies to conceptualize virtue, namely, a reductive (or dispositional) account and a non-reductive account. The dispositional account defines virtues as behavioral dispositions to act in accordance with certain principles or rules of conduct. I submit that there are at least four decisive objections against the reductive account. And I defend a non-reductive account, which conceptualizes virtues as character traits that should not be reduced to behavioral dispositions. Roughly, character is a person’s collection of higher-order and first-order desires, values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that have any bearing on moral matters. This account is non-reductive because although these elements of character are

interrelated, they are not reducible to each other; they cannot be described solely in terms of one of the others and they cannot be reduced to principles or rules of behavior.

What makes the difference between the reductive and the non-reductive account of virtue is the primacy of character in normative ethics. The reductive account entails the claim that all that matters in ethics is to identify the principles that determine what actions are morally correct. Whereas character has a secondary role under the reductive account, it has normative priority over deontic concepts according to the non-reductive account. Therefore, a theory of virtue that takes character seriously must be, I believe, non-reductive.

At least some character strengths, such as the virtue of gratitude and the virtue of self-respect, do not conform to the reductive approach. They cannot be reduced to dispositions to obey, respectively, the duty of gratitude and the duty of self-respect because such virtues are matters of attitude, desire, and belief, rather than matters of duty and conduct. Possessing the virtues – such as gratitude and self-respect – entails for the agent the cultivation of certain internal psychological states that are valued independently from the actions that they may result in. There is no way to capture such virtues in terms of rules to be followed.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VIRTUE

“It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.”

Oscar Wilde (1890) – *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

“In present-day philosophy an explanation is required how an unjust man is a bad man, or an unjust action a bad one; to give such an explanation belongs to ethics; but it cannot even be begun until we are equipped with a sound philosophy of psychology. For the proof that an unjust man is a bad man would require a positive account of justice as a “virtue.” This part of the subject-matter of ethics, is however, completely closed to us until we have an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is – a problem, not of ethics, but of conceptual analysis – and how it relates to the actions in which it is instanced: a matter which I think Aristotle did not succeed in really making clear. For this we certainly need an account at least of what a human action is at all, and how its description as “doing such-and-such” is affected by its motive and by the intention or intentions in it; and for this an account of such concepts is required.”

Elizabeth Anscombe (1958). *Modern Moral Philosophy*.

We have made some progress in the direction of understanding what virtue is. Now it is time to examine how to use this conceptualization in explanations of behavior and evaluations of agents and their behavior. The analysis and ascription of character traits is part of the investigation of what it is to be a good person and how those character traits relate to behavior.

The purpose of this chapter is the examination of the question of what it means to ascribe character traits to others (and to ourselves) and what the individual differences are that underlie trait attributions and cause behavior. The chapter is organized as follows. In section one, I shall discuss the distinction between character traits and personality traits. In section two, I shall briefly review the literature on attribution theory to report the inaccuracy of our folk psychological attributions. In section three, I shall discuss the argument that we can discuss the appropriateness of trait attribution without a conceptual analysis of what a trait is and dispute its premises. In section four, I shall introduce two models of trait attributions and discuss their strengths and weaknesses. In section five, I shall examine the underlying internal differences that cause behavior through the analysis of the problem of akrasia. Section six concludes.

3.1. TRAITS, CHARACTER, AND PERSONALITY

Roughly speaking, psychologists define personality traits as consistent patterns in the way people behave, think, and feel. When they describe a person with the trait term “timid,” they mean that this person tends to act timidly over time and across situations. In this way, they distinguish traits from those aspects of personality that are temporary, brief, and caused by external circumstances (Allport, 1934).

Psychologists stipulate that traits may serve three major functions:

“They may be used to summarize, to predict, and to explain a person’s conduct. Thus, one of the reasons for the popularity of trait concepts is that they provide an economical way to summarize how one person differs from another; attributing the trait ‘kind’ to a person summarizes a history of many different acts of kindness. Traits have the promise that they allow us to make predictions about the person’s future behavior; the bride expects the kind bridegroom to become a kind husband. Finally, traits suggest that the explanation for the person’s behavior will be found in the individual rather than in the situation; a kind person will act kindly even

when there is no situational pressure or external reward for doing so, thus suggesting some kind of internal process or mechanism that is producing the behavior.” (Pervin, Cervone, John, 2005).

We are interested here in the psychology of *character* traits, which are usually defined as the subset of personality traits that have a moral dimension (Gert, 1988; Brandt, 1970). Hence, we should add a fourth function. Attributions of character traits serve evaluative purposes. For ascribing a virtue (or a vice) to the agent entails praising (or blaming) her as well. Under a theory of virtue, we are responsible for the character traits we acquire, possess, and retain.

As explained in chapter two, psychologists were reluctant to consider character traits as “real” traits of personality. Allport, for example, distinguished natural traits from social categorizations. Since character traits have an evaluative component, he says they cannot have a “corresponding biophysical trait” (1934: 307).¹ Some virtue ethicists in business ethics – e.g. Solomon (2005), Hartman, (1998), and Moberg (1999) – suggest that the character traits of interest for virtue ethics supervene on the traits studied by personality psychology, as it was discussed in chapter two. Others – such as Audi (1997) – emphasize the distinction between personality and character traits because two people can be radically different in personality yet quite alike in moral character. Take, for instance, the traits of wittiness and good taste. It may be the case that strong personality is consistent with weak character and a charming personality may indeed come with execrable character.

¹ Allport identified 17,953 words in Webster’s dictionary that designate “distinctive and personal forms of behavior” (1934: 303). Of these, 29% were characterological and 25% were other personality traits. The others included terms descriptive of present activity, temporary states of mind and mood; terms explanatory of past behavior; physical qualities associated with character traits; capacities and talents.

Personality psychologists, industrial psychologists and clinical psychologists assess and measure people's traits as part of their professions. But trait assessments are not restricted to psychologists. It is a fact of human life that we all perform character assessments of the people we know in our daily life.² And we are assessed by our friends, colleagues, enemies, and ourselves. This is just a way to handle our social interactions. We try to find meaning in the stream of behaviors and events around us. We can have our personality judged by tests or by psychologists but, at the end, the judgments of our acquaintances matter just as much or even more than any evaluation rendered by psychologists. For the judgments of others can affect our opportunities. They can create self-fulfilling prophecies or expectancy effects (Funder, 1999). Furthermore, my judgments about myself influence what I seek to accomplish in life.

For all these reasons, one important dimension of the assessment of traits, whether by psychologists or by laypeople, is the degree to which those assessments are accurate.

3.2. ATTRIBUTION ERRORS, ETHICAL MISTAKES

The phenomenon of behavior explanation – including trait attribution – has been studied for a long time and by many researchers under the heading of Attribution Theory. Attribution refers to trait inferences, causal judgments, and responsibility ascriptions. The standard view of attribution theory is, according to Malle (2004), a composite of the important contributions by Heider (1958), Jones and Davis (1965), Kelley (1967), and Weiner and colleagues (1972). First, inferences about causation of a person's behavior

² For reasons that will be clear later, some social psychologists and philosophers want us to accept that folk psychology is grossly mistaken. They refer to many of our trait-based explanations – the sort conception we have of ourselves in Western folk psychology – as engaged in the “fundamental attribution error.” In that way, eliminativism about character traits has become a popular view among those scholars in the philosophy of psychology, especially so-called experimental philosophers. This problem will be addressed in Chapter Four.

fall into two broad categories, internal (or dispositional) causes and external (or situational) causes (Heider, 1958). Jones and Davis (1965) have offered an account of how people infer traits from single behaviors. Kelley (1973) found that attribution is a choice between internal and external causes and that the cognitive procedure by which people arrive at this choice is covariation assessment. And Weiner and collaborators (1974) found that people rely not only on the person-situation dimension of causality but also on the dimensions of stability and controllability and these three-dimensional causal judgments mediate some of people's motivations in response to social outcomes.

There are a number of shortcomings and unanswered questions in the extant literature (Malle, 2004; Flanagan, 1991). One of the most important is how the person-situation debate obscures a number of important distinctions. A seemingly impressive body of findings on situational effects in attribution research may be based on a serious misinterpretation of the evidence, as it will be discussed in chapter four. But for now and for our purposes, it will be useful to list some relevant findings in attribution research with reference to the main judgment schemata the folk psychologist displays in attributions of moral personality.

First, the fundamental attribution error (FAE), also known as overattribution, involves an inclination to overestimate the impact of dispositional factors and to underestimate situational ones. The concept of FAE grew out of an extensive body of research on social perception and cognition, and in turn the idea has stimulated much research (Heider, 1958; Ross, 1977). FAE raises serious questions about bias in many situations in which people judge other people, such as jury decisions, government elections, and clinical assessment. A common explanation of FAE involves differences in

the type and amount of information available to actors and observers (Ross, 1977). There seem to be cultural differences in the FAE tendency; North Americans and Westerners in general may have a bias toward blaming the individual in contrast to people in India and China and other collectivist or more holistic cultures. Easterners may tend to take situational information more into account when it is available (Miller, Bersoff, and Harwood, 1990).

Second, the actor-observer asymmetry is our tendency as actors to attribute our own behavior to the circumstances and the behaviors of those we observe to their dispositions (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Ross, 1977). As opposed to FAE, the actor-observer asymmetry emphasizes the difference in attribution between the person performing the behavior (who tends to attribute his behavior to his circumstances) and other people observing him (who tend to attribute his behavior to his personality). Persons looking at their own behavior have much previous behavior to compare with. Observers seldom have the same amount or kind of information available. Also, actors and observers differ in information that is salient or striking to them. Recently, Malle (2006) noted that there has been a lack of support for this hypothesis.

Third, self-serving bias, is a tendency to attribute desirable actions to standing dispositions in oneself and undesirable acts to external factors (Miller & Ross, 1975).

Other tendencies are worth mentioning as they may pertain to the ascription of virtues. The egocentric attribution bias is the tendency to think that characteristics of oneself – such as traits, emotions, and beliefs – are widely shared and normatively correct (Ross, 1977, Messick and Bazerman, 1986).³ Finally, according to the in-group

³ Unless we take a Rylean view of mental entities, it will seem natural for us to suppose that the agent has a certain epistemological authority about mental entities. So the egocentric bias is perhaps not all that biased,

favoritism bias, group membership creates in-group/ self-categorizations and enhancement in ways that favor the in-group at the expense of the out-group (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

Although we should be careful not to overstate the universality or degree of these biases, a number of important lessons can be drawn from the literature on attribution theory. First, a theory that is focused exclusively on traits and personal characteristics without taking into account external forces would probably fail the test of psychological realism that was discussed in chapter one. We will get back to this conclusion in chapter four. Second, in organizations, people may overattribute responsibility to individuals, such as leaders, when there are structural or system faults.⁴ Third, and more importantly for our present purposes, the literature suggests that many of us are prone to display problematic tendencies in attributing character traits to others and to ourselves.

Now, the ascription of virtue is praise of a person. And the ascription of bad traits of character is taken as criticism of a person. We often make ethical mistakes. But we need to be accurate in our ascriptions of good character in order for virtue attributions to perform their functions – to describe the agent’s behavior, to explain her conduct, and to evaluate her – properly. This is an essential dimension of a theory of virtue. Thus, we need a theoretical model of virtue attribution.

3.3. THEORIES ABOUT TRAITS

Aligned with Anscombe, I shall argue that the inquiry over the appropriateness of virtue attributions depends on a conceptual analysis of what a virtue is. In her words,

even though we are sometimes wrong, typically in a self-serving way. I thank Ed Hartman for raising this point.

⁴ This phenomenon has been well documented in the organizational behavior literature. See, for example, Chen and Meindl (1991) and Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich (1985).

“For the proof that an unjust man is a bad man would require a positive account of justice as a ‘virtue.’ This part of the subject-matter of ethics, is however, completely closed to us until we have an account of what type of characteristic a virtue is – a problem, not of ethics, but of conceptual analysis – and how it relates to the actions in which it is instanced: a matter which I think Aristotle did not succeed in really making clear.” (1958: 5)

Positivists disagree. Skinner (1953) thought that explanation should be entirely at the level of behavior, without relying on trait attributions or any other internal states. Behaviorism was indeed very influential in the social sciences and even though nowadays few people are behaviorists – at least in Skinner’s sense – many social scientists are close to a sort of methodological behaviorism, which is concerned with classifying behavior rather than theorizing about mental states. As an illustration, consider the extensive research on classificatory schema in personality psychology, which attempt to identify a minimum number of dimensions along which people differ (Cattell, 1947; Eysenck, 1991; McCrae and John, 1992). These dimensions are solely derived from factor analysis of questionnaire data, rather than from a priori theorizing.

In philosophy, Harman (1999) and Doris (2002) suggest that we can investigate the appropriateness of trait attribution without any conceptual analysis of the sort demanded by Anscombe because trait attributions are made solely on the evidence of behavior. If one accepts the claim that it is unnecessary to analyze what a trait is, it does not matter if there is a scarcity of the sort of analysis that concerns Anscombe. Yet, the exclusive emphasis on explanation at the level of behavior at the expense of investigating the underlying causes of behavior is, I submit, mistaken. To see why, it would be helpful to critically examine the argument that traits are irrelevant for social science.

The argument behind Doris’ claim on the irrelevance of trait analysis might be reconstructed as follows:

- (1) classification of types is based on observed behavioral regularities;
- (2) such classifications are made for the purpose of predicting future behavior;
- (3) even if behavior is caused by inner factors, behavior can be classified and predicted without resorting to those factors;
- (4) Therefore, the analysis of traits is irrelevant.

Doris does not go further than the first step of the argument because he thinks that the relevant behavioral regularities needed for the attribution of traits do not exist, as we will examine in chapter four. Hence, he concludes, we cannot attribute traits or classify them into types.

I shall argue that without a theory of traits we are unable to know what regularities to look for in the empirical evidence on people's behavior. The evidence provided by Harman (1999, 2000) and Doris (2002) to support the claim that traits do not exist pertains to a particular conception of traits that they implicitly presuppose.⁵ I shall argue that such a conception is misleading.

I aim to dispute the three premises of the irrelevance of trait analysis argument in the order they are presented. First, I shall defend the claim that the implicit theory of trait attribution which Doris intends to refute is untenable. Second, I shall dispute the second premise, on the ground that the aims of social science also include understanding, for which we require an analysis of the agent's inner states. Third, I shall argue that even granting the first two premises, the conclusion does not hold because premise (3) is wrong.

⁵ This is just a statement of the general view that all facts are "theory laden" because the observer of facts must be guided by some theory about what facts are the relevant ones to observe (Putnam, 2002).

Interestingly, the reason that rebuts the third premise constitutes, in addition, a strong argument for the importance of the analysis of individual differences in inner states in psychology and the social sciences.

Behavior is overdetermined. In any situation, a plurality of motivations may have caused the observed behavior, as we saw in chapter three. The observational equivalence⁶ of different traits means that we cannot just assume that any typology based on observed behavior maps onto the anatomy of the underlying traits. And where they come apart, our predictions of future behavior and our prescriptions of how to achieve particular outcomes may go wrong. The closer the correspondence between our classification of types and the underlying causes of individual differences in behavior, the more accurate we might expect our predictions to be. To this end, a trait analysis of the sort required by Anscombe is necessary to improve our understanding of types and classification into types and, hence, the usefulness of those classifications.

Overall, we are concerned with the problems that are caused by the observational equivalence of different inner states for the attribution of traits, the attribution of reasons, and the classification into types. I shall suggest that people differ in traits after all. Recognizing this difficulty must be useful for psychology. And the account of moral character that I sketched in chapter two may provide new insights for conceptualizing these differences.

⁶ See Gardner (1976)

3.4. TWO CONCEPTIONS OF VIRTUE ASCRIPTIONS⁷

Doris (2002) and Harman (1999, 2000) have claimed that traits do not exist, citing results from experimental psychology, which allegedly disconfirm the influence of character in explanations and predictions of behavior. Neither of them provides an analysis of what a trait is.

Harman (1999) cites the evidence that people overestimate the role of personality variables and underestimate situational variables in their explanations of behavior to conclude:

“Since it is possible to explain our ordinary belief in character traits as deriving from certain illusions, we must conclude that there is no empirical basis for the existence of character traits.” (Harman, 1999: 316).

The argument simply does not follow from the premises, though. And other commentators have noted such difficulties:

“the fundamental attribution error is irrelevant to the question of whether anyone really has a character trait. The issue is whether there is, in fact, warrant to attribute traits and whether the trait attributions that people commonly make are actually warranted. From the fact that people happen to add badly, it does not follow that there are no sums. Likewise with character traits.” (Sreenivasan, 2002: 54)

Further, Harman writes as describing a standard view of traits in psychology. But while the relative influence of personality and situational variables on behavior is the subject of a longstanding debate, psychologists – including organizational scholars – do not claim that there is no variance in behavior that is caused by personality variables.⁸

Doris, on the other hand, explicitly claims that an analysis of traits is unnecessary.

But he does have a notion of traits in mind, namely, the definition used by the

⁷ In Chapter Four, we will carefully review the evidence that is cited in the case against character traits and argue that such evidence may support a model of trait attribution, but not the one that is implicitly supposed in the situationist literature.

⁸ I thank Linda Trevino for this suggestion.

experimental social psychologists whose work is the basis of the thesis of the non-existence of traits. It is, indeed, what we called in chapter two a linear account of character.

To use Mischel's definition, traits are "continuous dimensions on which individual differences may be arranged quantitatively in accord with the amount of an attribute that the individual has." (Mischel, 1986: 135)

In this section, I shall first challenge such a simple and linear account of traits, where a trait is supposed to bear a one-to-one relationship with certain behavior in any situation where it might be relevant. Second, I shall distinguish the attribution of traits from the underlying individual differences that cause the behavior –which grants the inference of a trait.⁹

Evidence for or against the consistency of behavior will not illuminate the existence or non-existence of underlying individual differences without a theory of what they might consist of. Then, I discuss the inadequacy of the linear conception that underlies premise (1). If I am right about what it is to attribute a trait, the evidence on trait attribution should be viewed in the light of evidence from cognitive psychology about how people make categorizations. This severs the link between evidence on traits and stable underlying individual differences, which we might view as personality, clearing the way to present a positive theory of individual differences.

⁹ While Harman (1999) runs these together, Doris does not make a distinction between the two. The experimental evidence they discuss is, I submit, more informative about how people attribute traits than about what individual differences actually consist of.

3.4.1. Trait Attribution Without Traits¹⁰

Underlying the argument for the irrelevance of trait analysis is a model of traits. To attribute a trait is to place an individual on a linear ranking according to how much trait relevant behavior she exhibits. For example, in the studies by Hartshorne and May (1928) on honesty in children¹¹ – to be examined in chapter four – cheating was measured by counting how many points a child added to their score when marking her own test. One such observation is supposed to give a representative quantitative measure of the trait, which should correlate with quantitative measurements of a different behavior that supposedly measures the same trait in another situation.

According to this conception of traits, a child who is honest will be consistent in not adding points. And the more dishonest a child is, the more points she will add. The number of points added is the measure of dishonesty. This is supposed to be consistent across situations and across different behaviors for each individual.¹² In this linear conception, behavior relevant to the trait is supposed to correlate across different

¹⁰ We have strong reasons to believe that Doris' model is shared by most psychologists, though I should acknowledge that in a short paragraph of his book on personality judgment, Funder (1999) accepts that "there is no reason to expect a one-to-one relationship between any personality trait and any behavior. A given behavior is due to a complex combination of personality and situational factors, and Ahadi and Diener (1989) demonstrated how a behavior influenced by as few as three traits would be extremely difficult to predict from any one. So, we probably ought to be lenient when interpreting correlations between personality judgments and behavioral observations; sometimes I am astonished that not all of them are 0." (1999: 110) Unfortunately, he does not pursue this idea further.

¹¹ Hartshorne and May (1928) put children in a number of situations where they had a chance to engage in acts of lying, cheating, or stealing, and believed they would not be detected. For example, they were given money to play with that they could have kept, they were asked to report about work done at home, and they were observed taking tests to see who would cheat and who would not. Hartshorne and May found low correlation coefficients: the mean correlation between different pairs of situations presenting opportunities for deception or honesty was 0.23. A comprehensive discussion of this and other experiments will be provided in Chapter Four. I thank Chao Chen for raising this point.

¹² One point I have granted, which may be disputed, is that the behaviors being measured in Hartshorne and May's studies are all manifestations of the same trait. It is arguable in each case that the character trait being studied has been wrongly specified. For instance, Hartshorne and May define the trait of honesty broadly but it is at least arguable that different forms of non-deceptive behavior are different traits and that the appropriate level of trait description is "truth-telling" or "respect for property". If we think that they are in fact three different traits, then inconsistency between them is not evidence that traits do not exist.

situations. But this conception of traits does not distinguish between trait attribution and the underlying internal individual differences that cause behavior. This is equivalent to presuming that the attribution has a direct correspondence with the individual difference. In other words, it is both a linear conception of trait attribution and a linear conception of what the underlying individual differences consist of.

Doris's implicit model is simple. Too simple, though. Both as a conception of individual differences and as a model of trait attribution. For low correlation coefficients do not necessarily imply low individual consistency. And it is also incorrect as a model of trait attribution. Let me elaborate on the reasons why this is so.

As I explain in chapter two (Section 2.5), a problem with Doris's model is that it does not take into account the possibility that two different traits, thought of as internal individual differences, may come into conflict in a situation. He rightly notes (but disregards) the possibility of "masking" problems, where a disposition is present together with a countervailing disposition, manifest in identical circumstances, that prevents the first disposition from being manifested." (Doris, 2002: 16). But if a trait is sometimes "masked" by a conflicting trait, then behavior may appear inconsistent only if it is assessed with reference to that one trait. Thus, it is wrong to automatically infer that if behavior is not guided by the trait under investigation, then it is controlled by situational factors. Multiple traits may be relevant in a situation and the different traits may motivate different behavior. Even if a researcher gathered evidence of behavior in situations that are all trait-relevant for the trait under investigation, the situations may differ in terms of other traits that are relevant. Furthermore, behavioral inconsistency might be caused

because agents manifested different traits in each situation rather than because there were no traits underlying their behavior.

In sum, an observed behavior tells us something about the relative strengths of the motivations that influence behavior in different directions in that situation. At the very least, the linear conception of traits needs to be expanded, from the simple version where internal sources of individual differences have a one-to-one correspondence with behavior, to a version where behavior is a function of a complex set of competing causes. This resonates with the approach of psychologists who use factor analysis to model behavior as a linear combination of basic traits. Traits that are observationally equivalent provide a further complication. If two traits are observationally equivalent in a situation, it may require observations of behavior in different situations in order to distinguish which one the agent is displaying.

In any case, this idea that folk psychological trait attribution consists of making complicated judgments of covariation seems unlikely given what we know about how good people are at estimating covariations. Jennings, Annabile and Ross (1982) find that people underestimate covariations when they are presented with bivariate data in the absence of a theory, but overestimate covariations when they are asked to give an estimate of them in the absence of any data, i.e. on the basis of their a priori expectations. Their evidence suggests that, if the attribution of traits depends on the covariance of an agent's behavior across situations, then much of it is in the mind of the attributer, rather than corresponding to the agent's behavior.

With this linear model of trait attribution, Harman (1999) might be justified in saying that trait attribution is "a cognitive illusion," though there would be a story to be

told about why trait attribution persists if it is so unreliable. If we consider what it means to make a trait attribution, we can see that there is an alternative conceptualization that may avoid many of these problems.

3.4.2. Traits as Prototypes

In the linear conception of a trait that is in common usage, a trait is both something that is attributed on the basis of behavior and also the thing that causes such behavior. I propose an alternative conception of what it is to attribute a trait that separate these two things apart. According to this conception, to attribute a trait to someone – whether to oneself or to someone else – is to categorize someone (or oneself). For the most part, these categorizations will be made on the basis of behavior. If it is an external observer who is making the categorization, then she has no access to the internal causes of the agent's behavior other than the inferences she can make from the behavior itself.¹³

Under this alternative model, the relationship between individual differences and behavior is many-to-one rather than one-to-one. Thus, making an attribution on the basis of behavior does not carry any automatic implication about the underlying causes, at least not without a theory about how the two are connected. As I have argued, Doris' conception of trait attribution is incorrect regarding how individual differences relate to behavior and also about how traits are attributed. My account leaves open the possibility that a trait causes behavior. So, for instance, my mom burst into tears because she is fragile and not because I said something devastating, in the same way that it is possible to

¹³ We regard speech and other acts of communication by the actor as a form of behavior. As we have seen in Section One, actors and observers tend to use different types of explanation of the actor's behavior (Jones and Nisbett, 1972).

explain that a wineglass shattered because it is fragile and not because I threw it to the ground.

The literature on categorization in cognitive psychology may be helpful to understand virtue attribution as a type of categorization.¹⁴ Cognitive psychologists maintain that we make categorizations based on cognitive prototypes and family resemblances. Rosch (1978), for example, concludes that when categorizing an everyday object or experience, people rely less on abstract definitions of categories than on a comparison of the given object or experience with what they deem to be the object or experience that best represents a category. Rosch argues that people in different cultures tend to categorize objects by using prototypes, although the prototypes of particular categories may vary. In the 1970s, she formulated the prototype theory, which was a radical departure from the traditional necessary and sufficient conditions as in Aristotelian logic.

So, for instance, when categorizing something as a bird, we do not have a list of conditions such as “has wings” and “can fly”. Rather we have a prototype of a bird and judge exemplars, or possible category members, according to their similarity to that prototype. A robin might be a more prototypical bird than a penguin. And our classifications of exemplars that are more prototypical for category is faster than our classification of items that are peripheral to it. This leads to a graded notion of categories, which is a central notion in many models of cognitive science and cognitive semantics.

Mischel (1979) suggests that prototype theory may apply to trait attribution as well. Hogg and collaborators have elaborated the use of social categorization and prototypes in the social identity literature in management (Hogg, 2001; Hogg and Terry,

¹⁴ I am borrowing here from Gold’s paper on traits as social categorizations.

2000). And John, Hampson and Goldberg (1991) investigate the parallels between trait use and other categorizations and propose to set up similar taxonomies for character traits with behaviors at the lowest level, working up through increasingly broader traits at higher levels. They have identified a basic level that is generally preferred when describing friends and acquaintances. For instance, in the four level hierarchy charitable-generous-kind-good, they found kind to be basic. In the hierarchy tactful-polite-considerate-nice, considerate is preferred. The experimenters also tested the trait opposites, stingy-selfish-unkind-bad and tactless-impolite-inconsiderate-dislikeable and found the same level preferred. But the level used depends on context and background. As people get to know each other, their use of simple behavior terms decreases and their use of trait terms shows a corresponding increase. They move to more abstract categorizations.

In this conception of traits, to say that someone has a trait would be to attribute her some of the more central behaviors that are associated with it, but no particular behavior is necessary or sufficient to grant the attribution.

There is some evidence that people who are attributed a trait consistently display those behaviors that are more central to it. For example, in Mischel and Peake's (1982) study of conscientiousness,¹⁵ there was a correlation between class attendance and appointment attendance, assignment punctuality, completion of class readings, and

¹⁵ Mischel and Peake set up a study to investigate conscientiousness amongst 63 students at Carleton College in Minnesota. It was specifically designed to avoid some of the criticisms made of Hartshorne and May. They monitored nineteen behaviors that were supplied by the students themselves in pre-tests. These behaviors included: class attendance, study-session attendance, assignment neatness, assignment punctuality, room neatness, reserve-reading punctuality for course sessions and personal-appearance neatness. The average correlation coefficient was 0.13. One might argue that neatness, for example, does not have much to do with conscientiousness. At the very least, neatness seems to be very peripheral. Indeed, one of my objections I shall pose in Chapter Four against this sort of experiments in social psychology goes along these lines.

amount of time studying. This compares to the lack of correlation between class attendance and class-note thoroughness, punctuality to lectures, and assignment neatness. The latter three, while not unconnected to conscientiousness, are arguably more peripheral manifestations of the trait. They also come into conflict with other traits of neatness and efficiency. And not every situation is equally conducive to a particular trait.

Under the account of traits given above, it is arguable that peripheral manifestations of a trait are also those that are more likely to come into conflict with other traits and hence less likely to be manifested by someone that we attribute the trait to. And there can be traits without high population correlation coefficients. It might be the case that a particular trait is just not useful in describing some particular person's behavior, rather than that every person has some quantifiable amount of it.

One may think that the prototype account of virtue attribution retains the linear ranking as a convenience tool while capturing how people attribute traits. Although traits are not a one-dimensional ordering, linear orderings that are beneficial for research purposes may be constructed. In that case, we might need to add other measurements of the degree of a trait that people have.

Then, if trait attribution is a measure of similarity to a prototype, it might be measured by some combination of the number of trait relevant behaviors displayed, weighted by their centrality to the prototype. The utility of folk psychological trait attributions might derive from the same sources as the utility of making categorizations, which can simplify information processing and, by identifying groups of similar things, can aid inductive learning and the process of making inferences from our experiences.

In sum, the prototype account of trait attribution suggests that we might learn how to measure traits by studying the cognitive science literature on similarity judgments. While this account is superior to the linear conception held by Doris (2002), it leaves open the question of what are the individual differences that underlie differences in behavior that lead us to make trait attributions. I intend to respond to that question in the next section. So far, we have discredited the first step of the argument on the irrelevance of trait analysis (without any commitment to the prototype account anyway).

3.5. MORAL WEAKNESS AND CAUSAL EXPLANATION

Even though trait attribution is based on observed behavior and, hence, attributions are a form of perceptual categorization, folk psychology assumes that when we attribute a trait this refers to some underlying internal state of the agent. As we saw while reviewing the literature on attribution theory, psychologists' term for explanations of behavior in terms of factors that lie within the agent is person attribution – as distinguished from situation attribution, where behavior is explained in terms of factors that lie in the external situation – and they often use this as a single category (e.g. Jones and Nisbett, 1972). In this section, I shall discuss two kinds of causal explanations in folk theory. Afterwards, I shall introduce the problem of akrasia and two alternative accounts of akrasia in connection with the agent's decision making process. Finally, I shall suggest a way to make sense of the Aristotelian taxonomy of states of character by appealing to the agent's decision-making processes and her initial dispositions.

3.5.1. Causal Histories of Reasons

Some scholars differentiate between two different sorts of person attribution in folk theory. Malle (2004) suggests that person attributions can take a variety of forms, including explanations that give the agent reasons for the action and explanations that give a factor that lies in the causal history of the agent's reason (CHR), where this is a cause that does not involve reconstructing the agent's reasoning. Traits are included among CHR explanations. For instance, Knobe and Malle consider two possible responses to the question "Why did Jessie punish her son?"

- (1) "Because she thought that he was the one who broke the window."
- (2) "Because she is a tyrant."

The first of these answers is an attempt to reconstruct the reason why Jessie punished her son, as it appeared in her decision-making. The second cites one of Jessie's traits; it generalizes about her behavioral tendencies, suggesting a commonality with her behavior in other situations. She may well not even have been aware of this trait at the time when she decided to perform the action (Malle et al, 2000).

Actors are more likely to use reason explanations than observers and vice versa for causal history explanations. Malle, Knobe, and Nelson (2004) found that, when experimental subjects were asked to explain behavior, actors offered about one and a half times as many reason explanations as observers did, whereas observers offered about twice as many causal history explanations as actors did. The explanation of this phenomenon – which was anticipated at the beginning of this chapter in the context of the examination of the actor-observer asymmetry – is that actors might be expected, in general, to have access to their reasons, whereas observers would have to infer reasons

from behavior so it is easier for them to use causal history such as traits, where traits are used here to categorize observed behavior.

In any case, since trait explanations offer an explanation in terms of a general behavioral tendency while reason explanations make reference to the thoughts of the actor, we might think of reason explanations as the more basic type. Not all reason explanations connect to trait explanations (“he ate the last doughnut because he was hungry”) and not all trait explanations are based in reason explanations (“she is quiet”). But there is some overlap between the two. Let us explore the relation between reason explanations and trait explanations.

Using the non-reductive account of character proposed in chapter two, we can identify the factors that combine – admittedly in a complex way – to issue in the agent’s behavior, namely, higher-order desires, values, beliefs, framing capacities, and emotions. In chapter two, I have explained that higher-order desires are not merely desires to have or to be without certain first-order desires but desires that one or another of one’s first-order desires should be effective, in the sense of ordering action. That entails the ability to move from the right reasons to choosing or acting on the basis of those reasons.

Now, the agent may act on her reasons. Or, she may not. She may fail to act upon her second order desires; she may be weak willed. She forms second-order desires, but seems to lack the strength of character to conform her actions to her idea of what sort of person she wants to be. This problem is known as *akrasia* in philosophy.

3.5.2. The Puzzle of *Akrasia*

There are other possibilities besides possessing a good or bad character. Aristotle lists three pairs of contrary states of character at the beginning of Book VII of the

Nicomachean Ethics. There are six possible states of character, listed here in order of merit:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>heroic excellence</i> (extraordinary virtue) | 6. <i>bestiality</i> (below viciousness) |
| 2. <i>ordinary excellence</i> (i.e., ordinary virtue) | 5. <i>vice</i> (badness of character) |
| 3. <i>continence</i> (enkrateia) | 4. <i>incontinence</i> (akrasia) |

The three on the left side are good, the three on the right side bad. The Greek word ‘akrasia’ is translated literally as ‘lack of self-control’, but it is used as a general term for the phenomenon known as weakness of will, or incontinence. It is defined as the disposition to act contrary to one’s own considered judgment about what is best to do. Understood as the inability to act as one thinks right, akrasia is important to the moral philosopher.¹⁶ And it is controversial as well. Whereas it is intuitive that people sometimes do act in ways which they believe to be contrary to their own best reasons, principles or long-term goals, it also seems to follow from certain plausible views about intentional action that akrasia is not possible. Anyone who chooses to do something which is in fact worse than something they know they could have done instead must necessarily have judged incorrectly the relative values of the actions, according to Socrates.

For Aristotle, akrasia is something of a puzzle. The bulk of what he says on akrasia is concentrated in chapter 3 of Book VII. But there are numerous passages in other of Aristotle’s works (e.g. *Eudemian Ethics*, *Magna Moralia*). There is considerable disagreement among commentators even about the basic question of whether Aristotle is

¹⁶ Failing to live up to one’s sincerely expressed beliefs about what it would be morally best to do is another form of akrasia. People often do things they genuinely consider to be morally wrong. The existence of this type of weakness presents problems for any theory which makes action the test or criterion of the sincerity of moral beliefs. For such theories tend to suggest that those who do not act on the principles they profess cannot really be said to hold those principles at all. Their failing is not akrasia but hypocrisy.

an apologist for the Socratic position or rather a critic of its over-intellectualized view of the causes of error. But there is not space here to review the multiple efforts to sort out the apparent contradiction. I shall only, provisionally, read Aristotle as implying the possibility that an agent pursues an undesirable course of action while knowing well that it is not the best thing to do.¹⁷

What is important for our purposes regarding the Aristotelian account of *akrasia*, is the distinction between two different types of agents, the vicious (or intemperate) agent and the *akrates* (or weak willed) agent, whose behavior is observationally equivalent. Although, for Aristotle, both vice and *akrasia* are moral states to be avoided, the distinction between them is important – as reflected on the list above – because they lack different virtues, namely, temperance in the case of the vicious agent and *phronesis* in the case of the *akratic* agent. Then, if we follow Aristotle, the attribution of internal motivations is important in identifying what it is to be virtuous and who is a virtuous person. Aristotle explicitly recognizes that the same behavior may have divergent causes:

“we include the incontinent and the intemperate person, and the continent and the temperate person, in the same class, but do not include any of those who are incontinent in any particular way. It is because incontinence and intemperance are, in a way, about the same pleasures and pains. In fact, they are about the same things, but not in the same way; the intemperate person decides on them, but the incontinent person does not. That is why, if someone has no appetites, or slight ones, for excesses, but still pursues them and avoids moderate pains, we will take him to be more intemperate than the person who does it because he has intense appetites.” (NE, 1148a13-14)

¹⁷ For example, Aristotle in *Magna Moralia* sees the incontinent agent as one “who knows indeed from reason that he ought not, but gives in to pleasure and succumbs to it” (*MM*, 1203b5–6). In the *Eudemian Ethics*, he says that to act incontinently “is to act through appetite contrary to what the man thinks best” (*EE*, 1223b8–9), and that the *akrates* has “a pain of expectation, thinking that he is doing ill.” (*EE*, 1224b20–21)

We have already seen that two agents who take the same action may do so for different reasons. But even two agents who act on the same reason may have internal differences. In his doctrine of the practical syllogism, Aristotle sets out to distinguish the difference between these agents in terms of their decision-making processes.

3.5.3. The Aristotelian Account of Akrasia

There are several, differing, interpretations of Aristotle on akrasia. One is that the strong-willed person and the weak-willed person both know that a donut is fattening and sweet, but the latter uses the fact of its sweetness in the minor premise of the syllogism because she is so overcome by her sweet tooth or something that she perceives the situation incorrectly – that is, she sees donut-eating as primarily a matter of enjoying sweetness, whereas it should be seen as primarily a matter of taking in a lot of calories. The weak-willed person can answer correctly if asked whether the donut is fattening, but she does not act on that description, perhaps on account of inappropriate emotions, or maybe, drunkenness.

There are two elements in Aristotle's account of akrasia: its characterization as an inner conflict and the causal explanation of it in terms of the reasoning process. In earlier books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle alludes to akrasia as a conflict between passion and reason. For instance, he observes, "the incontinent man acts with appetite but not with choice" (1111b13). In book VII, Aristotle offers a causal explanation, illustrating his proposed resolution of akrasia with the example of someone who eats a sweet food (1147a24-b25). He characterizes practical reasoning as involving a syllogism with:

- a major, universal premise (e.g. everything sweet ought to be tasted)

- a minor, particular premise (e.g. this thing is sweet)
- that lead to a conclusion (e.g. this thing should be tasted).¹⁸

Both akrasia and intemperance involve acting on this syllogism. Yet, Aristotle says that “the intemperate person acts on decision when he is led on, since he thinks it is right in every case to pursue the pleasant thing at hand; the incontinent person, however, thinks it is wrong to pursue this pleasant thing, yet still pursues it.” (1146b22-4) Thus, although they are both acting on the same reason, the difference between them is that the incontinent also accepts the premises of a second syllogism that leads to the conclusion that the thing should not be eaten. According to Aristotle, her mistake is to implement the conclusion of the wrong syllogism.

Aristotle explains that akrasia can exist because of the distinction he makes between “having” knowledge and “using” it (1146b31ff). The akrates fails to attend to the minor premise of the “good” syllogism, and hence to draw its conclusion. In order to reason to the conclusion of a syllogism, the agent must perceive the property of the thing that is relevant to the minor premise.

The Aristotelian syllogism could be roughly split into two types, factual propositions and more general normative propositions. The equivalent of Aristotle’s characterization of the two syllogisms would be the existence of two decision-making processes, each leading to a different decision on the target proposition: the agent has a set of initial dispositions that are implicitly inconsistent with respect to the target proposition. So the decision-making process of the akratic agent might be:

(1) this thing is sweet

¹⁸ It is generally thought that Aristotle intended that the conclusion is also an action. Wiggins (1980) argues that the conclusion of the syllogism cannot also be an action if akrasia is to exist.

- (2) everything sweet ought to be tasted
- (3) this thing should be tasted.

3.5.4. The Davidsonian Account of Akrasia

While the syllogism that the akrates uses can easily be inferred from Aristotle's text, he is less specific about the propositions that make up the "good" syllogism. Nor does he give a justification for the asymmetric position of the two syllogisms in his treatment: the akrates is compared to "the man asleep, mad, or drunk," (1147a14) and temperate action does not occur until "the ignorance is dissolved and the incontinent man regains his knowledge." (1147b6-7) But while the akrates is only aware of the syllogism on which she acts, the temperate person does not have a corresponding ignorance of the syllogism associated with appetite.

However, the syllogism can be reinterpreted as the first step in a decision-making process. If the decision-making process represents the availability of the propositions, then this is not to say that an agent cannot be aware of the second syllogism, only that the propositions of the second syllogism are less available. If availability is a function of both importance and salience; the psychological explanation of akrasia is that the salience of the akratic syllogism outweighs the importance of the good syllogism. This position is consistent with Davidson's view on akrasia.

Davidson (1980) argues that, for us to make sense of akrasia, the judgment that the akrates fails to uphold must be an "all things considered" judgment, as opposed to the *prima facie* reason that she acts on. Although there are reasons that advocate intemperance, the akratic agent accepts some proposition that weighs up reasons and

would come out in favor of continence, outweighing the simple reason in favor of intemperance. Using (x)* to denote the propositions on the “good” syllogism,

(2)* “things that are fattening but sweet should not be eaten”

Despite this, the akrates acts on the reason that the food is sweet rather than on the balance of reasons that it is sweet but fattening and therefore should not be eaten. But this can still be caused by a failure of the agent to know, in the Aristotelian sense, a minor premise like,

(1)* “this thing is sweet and fattening”

That is, a factual proposition including the observation that the thing is fattening. We might think of Davidson’s “all things considered” judgment as a complex proposition, in that it involves being aware of a conjunction of properties of the option. An alternative, which is close to interpretations of the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is that the syllogisms consist of simple propositions, so the agent acts on her strongest reason rather than on the balance of reasons.

For Davidson, since there is no logical conflict between an all things considered judgment and a *prima facie* judgment, the irrationality of the akrates consists in acting only on some subset of her reasons. Contemplation that activates them all would allow the agent to achieve continence. In both the Aristotelian and the Davidsonian account, the akrates can be represented as accepting an implicitly inconsistent set of initial dispositions, so her choice depends on the decision-process she applies.

3.5.5 An Aristotelian Taxonomy of Individual Differences

Aristotle discusses *akrasia* in the context of the distinction between vice and *akrasia*, and between virtue and continence. Even though the “moral states” in each pair

result in the same action, there are, as we saw, internal differences between the agents. Akrasia and continence both involve internal conflict, whereas the virtuous and – arguably – the wicked agent display a type of unity. The conflict could be represented as an implicit inconsistency with respect to the target proposition. The differing actions of the akrates and the continent agent would result from the use of two different reasoning processes. Whereas the intemperate agent and the akrates may both eat the food (and eat it for the same reason), the intemperate does so on conviction. But the akrates has conflicting initial dispositions and uses a decision-making process where the propositions concerning sweet things come first.

In the same vein, there is a distinction between someone who displays the Aristotelian virtue of temperance and someone who is continent. The temperate agent does not have inconsistent initial dispositions while the continent agent does, but, unlike the akrates, her decision-making process starts with the propositions of the “good” syllogism. Consequently, we can identify two aspects of the decision process that are crucial in determining behavior, namely, the set of propositions that the agent has initial dispositions to accept and, if these propositions are implicitly inconsistent, the decision-making process she uses.

Because of their differing initial dispositions, the temperate and the intemperate agents will do different things regardless of the decision-making process they apply. And the akrates and the self-controlled agent may have initial dispositions to accept the same propositions but they take different actions because they use different decision-making processes.

In our taxonomy of differences in decision-making, there is yet another distinction worth making. In Book VII chapter 7, Aristotle also distinguishes between the virtues of temperance and endurance. While temperance involves not being led astray by appetite (with the opposite state being intemperance), endurance involves overcoming fear of acting (with the opposite vice being softness). The soft agent and the akrates both seem to reach the correct conclusion but fail to act on it. Like akrasia, softness may have perceptual solutions. For example, one might get someone to perform a task she lacks the motivation for doing by making salient the consequences of not doing it. Then, if there is a correlation between cognition of a reason and motivation to act on it, then it may be possible to generate the one by stimulating the other.

3.6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we examined the question of what it means to ascribe character traits to others and to ourselves and what the individual differences are that underlie trait attributions and, presumably, cause behavior. I have started with the distinction between character traits and personality traits. I also briefly reviewed the psychological literature on attribution theory that indicates the inaccuracy of our folk ascriptions of virtue and vice. That is indeed one of main concerns of this chapter; how we can improve the accuracy of our character judgments?

I have reconstructed the argument on the irrelevance of character traits and challenged its premises. First, the linear model of trait attribution supplies a deficient account of character ascriptions and the underlying individual differences that cause behavior. I provisionally supply a prototype account of trait attributions that integrates the literature on cognitive science and social categorizations to conceptualize traits. I

argued that such a conception fares better with reference to ascriptions of virtue (and vice). And, finally, I have discussed the problem of akrasia and two philosophical accounts of akrasia as an approximation to what individual differences there are underlying and causing behavior.

At the beginning of this chapter, we identified three functions of ascriptions of virtue and vice. Attributing character traits serves explanatory, descriptive, and evaluative functions. Then, ascribing the possession of a virtue entails appealing to character traits in a causal explanatory way. And the descriptive function of virtue-attribution consists in classifying and categorizing people's past behavior (Hampshire, 1953). We have already seen in chapter two that if virtues are behavioral dispositions, they cannot be evaluative standards. A dispositional analysis of virtue divests character of the evaluative priority they are meant to have on virtue-based normative theories (Hudson, 1986: 36-41; Frankena, 1973: 65-67; Waide, 1988).

There is another important lesson to draw from the investigation of trait attributions. In its descriptive dimension, trait attribution entails no particular mechanism by which the behavior was caused, whereas an explanatory ascription of virtue carries a commitment to the existence of some causal mechanism. We need to keep the distinction between the explanatory and the descriptive function of traits if we want to avoid the charge of circularity in our explanations of behavior. While it may be acceptable for the folk to start making descriptive attributions and move from there to explanatory attributions, it is more problematic for psychologists to develop their personality theories without keeping the distinction between the explanatory and the descriptive. Consider, for example, the Big Five model, arguably one the most widely accepted models of

personality (Funder, 1999: 143). According to Big Five, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism are the basic dimensions of personality. Based on paper and pencil questionnaires, it has been found that these are the five dimensions that underlie our descriptive trait attributions. However, to move from such an observation to the claim that they also are the five dimensions that underlie behavior a different story needs to be told. For it is reasonable for us to conclude, especially on the basis of the evidence on FAE and other attribution biases, that folk attributions may not necessarily track the causes of individual differences in behavior.

If my argument is sound, it has a significant implication. If descriptive attributions are pre-theoretical, then we should not expect them to track the underlying motivations of behavior. If folk attributions are in fact not good trackers of explanatory traits, it follows that we have no reasons to expect global consistency between behaviors.

Some psychologists may reply, counter the standard view, that there is no explanatory function of traits. That is, they could respond that personality is entirely socially constructed and so traits do not really exist within people. Traits exist only between people, the argument goes.¹⁹ I do not think the objection holds. Folk psychological trait attributions are descriptive and explanatory, even if there is a fuzzy border between them. We have reasons to maintain the distinction. But, if the objection holds, if that is what a character trait is, then we may need to reconsider the claim that virtues are traits of character. And, in such a case, Gordon Allport's view on the status of character traits would be right after all...

¹⁹ I thank Danielle Warren for pressing this point.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FRAGILITY OF VIRTUE

*“Near this Spot
are deposited the Remains of one
who possessed Beauty without Vanity,
Strength without Insolence,
Courage without Ferocity,
and all the virtues of Man without his Vices.”*

Lord Byron (1808) – “Epitaph to a Dog”

So far I have sketched the main elements of a theory of virtue, set up the conditions that such a theory must meet if it is going to be psychologically realistic, postulated a refined notion of virtue, and offered an account of virtue attribution in connection with the individual differences that underlie behavior. Now for the objections.

One of the main appeals of the theory of virtue presented in chapter one, which explains its centrality in moral theory and the recent interest in character notions in philosophy and the social sciences, is that unlike its main competitors, it offers a richer account of our ethical life and a natural account of moral motivation. I have argued in chapter one that virtue ethics fares better than competing normative theories in business ethics because virtues are thick concepts that bring together the descriptive and the normative dimension of morality. And I have proven that a character-based theory of business ethics is more psychologically realistic than its rivals.

However, situationist moral philosophers – notably Harman (1999, 2005) and Doris (2002, 2005) – supported by social psychologists – e.g., Ross and Nisbett (1991) and Zimbardo (2007) – and some organizational theorists – e.g., Pfeffer (1986) and

Snyder and Ickes (1995) – have posed a radical challenge on character-based moral theories. Using evidence from experimental social psychology, they claim that character traits do not exist (Harman, 2000), that traits do not make significant contributions to predicting and explaining behavior (Ross and Nisbett, 1991), and hence, that the moral psychological theory standard in virtue ethics is deeply misguided and requires revision (Doris, 2005).

Situationists explain that the standard concept of moral character – the idea that people possess robust and cross-situationally consistent character traits – is not supported by the empirical evidence in experimental psychology. If dispositions were as robust as familiar conceptions of character and personality lead one to believe, they claim, insubstantial factors would have no effect on human behavior (Doris, 2005). But the empirical data show, the argument goes, that these factors do have impressive consequences (Ross and Nisbett, 1991: 45-46). The alleged evidence consists of a large collection of experiments ranging from the Milgram studies on obedience to authority (1974) to the Stanford prison experiment by Zimbardo (1974), including the empirical research on mood effects (Isen and Levin, 1972) and group effects (Latané and Darley, 1970), and the Good Samaritans studies (Darley and Batson, 1973).

Similar findings have been reported in the domain of management theory and organizational behavior, where the field has allegedly evolved from a dispositional strategy to a situationist theory of human behavior in the organizational setting (Snyder and Ickes, 1995; Davis-Blake and Pfeffer, 1986). Economists have also proposed to eschew explanations in terms of individual differences, by which they mean differing utility functions (Stigler and Becker, 1977).

Those experimental results have been seen as grounds for doubting that there are any virtues or vices, or more broadly, any traits at all. Situationists conclude that traits are so weak that,

“in this situation and in most other novel situations, one cannot predict with accuracy how particular people will respond. At least one cannot do so using information about an individual’s personal dispositions or even about that individual’s past behavior.” (Ross and Nisbett, 1991: 2)¹

The limitations of the moral psychology that underlies virtue ethics are hardly new for virtue ethicists working in applied ethics (Hartman, 1998; Solomon, 2003; Koehn, 1998; Hartman, 2001; Solomon, 2005; Moore, 2005). Still, the situationist challenge is more radical. Given the fact that individuals apparently do not display cross-situational consistent behavior, it follows that human behavior is determined by situational factors rather than by dispositional traits; hence, situationists claim that people lack robust character traits. Thus, virtue ethics needs serious revision in order for character concepts to have any explanatory power (Harman, 1999: 316; Doris, 2002: 64-65).

In this chapter, I shall address the debate over the reality of virtue and vice and the existence and properties of character traits and their manifestations (if any) in human behavior. The question is whether a plausible theory of virtue needs to dispose of *aretaic* notions in order to account for the findings in experimental social psychology. In the course of this chapter, I shall provide two arguments to show that the situationist thesis does not succeed. First, I shall argue that the situationist argument relies on a misinterpretation of the experimental evidence, taking into account the findings in

¹ Notice how social psychologists Ross and Nisbett distinguish in this paragraph personal dispositions from an “individual’s past behavior.” This excerpt reaffirms the conclusion we reached at the end of chapter three on the dual function of trait attributions.

chapter three. Second, along the lines of the conclusion of chapter two on the nature and moral status of virtue, I shall argue that situationists hold a conception of virtue that is inadequate.

The chapter is divided into six sections. In section one, I shall answer the question of whether and why the dispute between social and personality psychologists is relevant to a theory of virtue. In section two, I shall recapitulate the experimental evidence on the non-existence of character traits and reconstruct the situationist argument. In section three, I shall offer six methodological objections on the interpretation of the situationist data and four conceptual objections with reference to the notion of virtue used by the experimenter. In section four, I shall summarize a large body of empirical work on dispositional effects in personality psychology and organizational scholarship. In section five, I shall argue that the theory of virtue discussed in chapter one is consistent with a middle-ground position between Situationism and Dispositionalism. Section six concludes.

4.1. MORAL INCONSISTENCY AND ELIMINATIVISM ABOUT TRAITS

I have argued that the theory of virtue sketched in chapter one meets the requirement of psychological realism. However, for my argument to succeed, I have stipulated that in order for a theory of virtue to meet psychological realism, the following three claims must be true. First, there must be character traits. Second, human beings differ in the character traits they possess. Third, people can develop the sort of traits that constitute the virtues. If any of these claims is false, I submit, charges of lack of psychological realism are granted. The first claim can be understood as entailing some sort of behavioral consistency. If someone is, say honest, then we assume that she has a

character of a certain sort that makes us expect that she habitually behaves honestly (when she acts *in character*, at least).

The strongest interpretation of this consistency condition is that possession of a virtue entails for the agent that she will unfailingly behave in a virtuous way anytime the circumstances call for such a relevant behavior. Doris illustrates what situationists have in mind with the example of the babysitter:

“we want to predict and explain not only general trends but also particular behaviors. When we hire a babysitter, we are not necessarily attributing broadly admirable dispositions to him. But what we are confidently predicting is that he will not molest our children next Tuesday night from seven to eleven when we go out for dinner... Here, and elsewhere, it is not the broad behavioral trend but the particular behavioral that is of central interest.” (2002: 74)

Ultimately, the situationist challenge to virtue ethics entails an accusation, namely, lack of psychological realism. Situationists claim that there exist quantities of empirical evidence indicating that behavior radically varies with slight situational variations, such as whether the actor is in a hurry, in a good mood, or observing an emergency in a group or alone (Ross and Nisbett, 1991; Darley and Batson, 1973). Hence, the argument goes, compassion, honesty and other ethically relevant behaviors are far more situationally variable than virtue ethicists would have us believe (Doris, 2002).

Central to the situationist thesis is the notion of robust character traits, which entails three main predictions:

- (a) Cross-situational consistency: character traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions;

- (b) Temporal stability: character traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions; and
- (c) Evaluative integration: The occurrence of a trait with a particular evaluative valence is probabilistically related to the occurrence of other traits with similar evaluative valences (Doris, 2002: 22).²

The contrast between weak personality traits and powerful situational factors constitutes the tenets of Situationism (Malle, 1997). These findings are taken to indicate that cross-situational consistency of behavior is so low as to call into question the causal role of personality traits in determining behavior (Mischel, 1968). As Ross and Nisbett put it:

“What has been demonstrated through a host of celebrated laboratory and field studies is that manipulations of the immediate social situation can overwhelm in importance the type of individual differences in personal traits or dispositions that people normally think of as being determinative of social behavior.” (1991, p. xiv)

Management scholars have reported similar findings in the realm of organizational research (e.g. Baucus, 1989; Barnard, 1938; Davis-Blake and Pfeffer, 1986; Snyder and Ickes, 1995). Davis-Blake and Pfeffer argue:

“...there is a substantial amount of evidence that organizational settings are strong situations that have a large impact on individual attitudes and behavior. Therefore, dispositions are likely to have only limited effects on individual reactions in organizations.” (1986, p. 387)

Harman goes even further. On the basis of the evidence on attribution theory that we reviewed at the beginning of chapter three, he argues that we misguidedly attribute

² This corresponds to the thesis that there is a unity of virtue, which was presented in chapter one. According to this thesis, virtues are so integrated with each other that a person cannot have one virtue without having all the others. See chapter one section five.

behavior to character traits that do not exist. We commit the fundamental attribution error. As he puts it:

“...there is no evidence that people differ in character traits. They differ in their situations and in their perceptions of their situations. They differ in their goals, strategies, neuroses, optimism, etc. But character traits do not explain what differences there are.” (2000, p. 329)

In sum, Situationism maintains that virtue ethics lacks empirical support. The argument looks persuasive: if behavior were typically ordered by traits, systematic observation would reveal pervasive behavioral consistency. Given that systematic observation does not reveal pervasive behavioral consistency, it follows that behavior is not typically ordered by traits (Doris, 2002). Therefore, Situationists conclude, it follows we ought to abandon the very project of advancing a theory of virtue, at least the sort of theory defended in chapter two, where character has priority over deontic notions.

4.2. THE ARGUMENT FOR SITUATIONISM

The situationist argument is constructed upon the empirical evidence accumulated by social psychologists. If different behavior is explained by different situations – as opposed to individual characteristics – and the experimenter fails to observe robust character traits, it follows that virtue ethics needs a serious revision in order to account for the empirical evidence. Doris (2002) argues that there are no robust character traits. Rather, he proposes that personality should be conceived of as fragmented, as a disintegrated association of situation-specific local traits.

4.2.1. Experimental Psychology: How Situations Explain Behavior

A comprehensive treatment of the empirical issues surrounding the person-situation debate in personality and social psychology merits its own dissertation. However, in this section, I shall briefly summarize the results of the most widely cited experiments. In due course, I shall present the interpretation of these results provided by Situationism to discredit the existence of robust character traits.

4.2.1.1. Mood effects experiments

Isen and Levin (1972) had 41 randomly selected adults making phone calls at public telephone booths. Half of the subjects found a dime if they checked the coin return slot. As the caller left the phone booth a confederate dropped a folder full of papers that scattered in the caller's path. The dependent measure was whether the subject helped the confederate pick up the papers. Those subjects who found a dime in the coin return slot were more prone (87.5%) to help the confederate pick up the folder than subjects who did not find a coin (4%).³ Similarly, students given a cookie while studying at the university library were more likely than those not given a cookie to agree to help another student by participating in a psychology experiment (Isen and Levin, 1972). Positive affect has been repeatedly found related to prosocial behavior (Aderman, 1972). People are more likely to help when exposed to pleasant aromas (Baron, 1997).

4.2.1.2. Bystander intervention studies

Latané and Darley (1970) discovered that undergraduate subjects who were filling out forms in a room where artificial smoke was introduced through a wall vent were more disposed to report the smoke when they were alone (70%) than when other subjects were

³ It is important to notice that Isen and Levin subjects did not undergo personality tests, so there is no direct evidence of individual differences between helpers and non-helpers.

in the room (10% of the subjects helped when they were with two passive confederates and 38% when they were with 3 naive subjects).

Sex, socioeconomic status, and other demographic variables were not strongly associated with helping behavior. Similarly, among bystanders hearing an epileptic seizure over earphones, those who believed other witnesses were present were less likely to seek assistance for the victim than were bystanders who believed they were alone (Darley and Latané, 1968). And subsequent research on response to the victim of a fall confirmed this finding and suggested that assistance from a group of bystanders was less likely to come if the group members were strangers than if they were prior acquaintances (Latané and Rodin, 1969). In these experiments, various trait measures – e.g., authoritarianism, Machiavellianism, and social responsibility – failed to predict helping behavior (Latané and Darley, 1970: 101).

4.2.1.3. Good Samaritan studies

Darley and Batson had Princeton theological seminary students invited for a study on religious education and vocations. As part of the experiment, first they completed personality questionnaires about their religion. Later they began experimental procedures in one building. They were told to go to another building to continue giving a short verbal presentation. One task was to prepare a talk about seminary jobs; the other about the story of the Good Samaritan. Before leaving the first building, subjects were told either that they were running late, were right on time, or were a little early. On the way between the two sites subjects encountered a confederate slumped in an alleyway, head down, coughing and groaning.

The seminarians who were not in a hurry were six times more likely to help an unfortunate who appeared to be in distress than those in the rushed condition (Darley and Batson, 1973). The experimenters found little relationship between personality measures tapping types of religiosity and helping behavior on the part of the seminarians (Darley and Batson, 1973: 106).

4.2.1.4. Honesty and deception experiments

Hartshorne and May (1928) placed over 8,000 schoolchildren aged eight to sixteen in moderately tempting situations where they had opportunities

- to cheat on tests (by copying from a key, adding more answers after time was called, peeping, and faking a solution to a puzzle);
- to cheat on homework, or by faking a record in athletic contests, or by faking, peeping, or stealing in party games;
- to steal money from a box used in a test; and/or
- to lie about their conduct in general or about cheating on tests as in the first point above.

They found that deceptive and honest behaviors were not a function of unified traits but specific functions of the situation. For example, copying from an answer key correlated strongly with copying from a key on a similar test at a later day (0.70), but not with continuing to work on a speed test after the time is called (0.29).

4.2.1.5. The Milgram experiment

In the most widely discussed situationist experiment, the subjects agreed to participate in a Yale University study on memory and learning. They were instructed by the Milgram to administer “painful but not dangerous” electrical shocks, in fifteen-volt

increments to a coparticipant (unbeknownst to the subjects, a confederate of the experimenter) for incorrect answers (including no answer) to word-matching questions.

The subjects believed that for each wrong answer, the learner was receiving actual shocks but there were no shocks. After the confederate was separated from the subject, the confederate set up a tape recorder integrated with the electro-shock generator, which played pre-recorded sounds for each shock level. After a number of voltage level increases, the actor started to bang on the wall that separated him from the subject. After several times banging on the wall and complaining about his heart condition, all responses by the learner would cease.

When 'teachers' protested, they were instructed by the experimenter to go on, with increasingly forceful verbal prods. First, they were told: "Please continue." If they refused, then they were told: "The experiment requires that you continue." If they still persisted, they were advised: "It is absolutely essential that you continue." The last instruction was: "You have no other choice, you must go on." At that point, if the subject refused to continue, the experiment terminated and he was counted as "disobedient." Subjects who asked about the painfulness of the shocks were told by the experimenter that the shocks might be painful but would result in no permanent tissue damage. And those subjects who said that the learner did not want to continue were told by the experimenter that whether the learner liked it or not, he must go on until he had learned all the word-matches correctly.

In the first set of experiments, 65% of the subjects administered the experiment's final 450-volt shock to the 'learner.' Pre-experiment predictions were that only 0-3 % of the subjects would go all the way (Milgram, 1974). Variations in the experiments provide

additional evidence. When subjects were free to choose the shock levels to administer, only 3% delivered the maximum shock. When the experimenter was physically absent and gave his orders by phone, there was 21% of obedience. In a touch-proximity condition with the learner obedience was 30%. And when the shocks were administered by a confederate while the subject performed subsidiary tasks obedience was 93%.

Sex of the subjects, age, education, and other demographic variables were unimportantly related to behavior. And Milgram reported that the relation of personality measures such as the F-scale for authoritarianism and obedience “although suggestive, is not very strong.” (1974: 205)

4.2.1.6. The Stanford Prison Experiment

Zimbardo and colleagues (1974, 2007) devised a functional representation of an American prison, selecting 21 male college students with no history of crime, emotional disability, psychical handicap or intellectual and social disadvantage. The subjects were randomly assigned the role of “prisoner” or “guard;” prisoners were confined 24 hours a day in a simulated penitentiary.

The experiment quickly grew out of hand. Only a few days after it started prisoners suffered (and accepted) sadistic (and humiliating) treatment from the guards. The high level of stress progressively led them from rebellion to inhibition. By the experiment’s end, many showed severe emotional disturbances. Subjects were administered a Machiavellianism scale for manipulateness, an F-scale for conventionality and authoritarianism, and the Comrey Personality Inventory, including subscales for trustworthiness, conformity, and stability. There were no significant differences between ‘prisoners’ and ‘guards’ on any of these measures. Haney and

Zimbardo report that “despite using several valid personality tests, we found that we were unable to predict (or even postdict) who would behave in what ways and why.” (1998: 720)

4.2.2. Situationism in Organizational Scholarship

Prominent organizational scholars have found similar effects, and hence, have reached similar conclusions. Davis-Blake and Pfeffer report that a large body of research confirms that individual attitudes and behavior in organizations are significantly affected by structural factors such as compensation systems, reinforcement patterns, goals, job design, socialization and position in social information networks. They conclude that “structural characteristics appear to be more directly linked to job attitudes than personality traits.” (1986: 388) In the same vein, Baucus suggests that “shared values, norms and beliefs can influence an otherwise moral individual to engage in questionable or illegal activities. Industry and corporate culture also perpetuate illegality, reinforcing wrongdoing, and resulting in repeated violations.” (1994: 711-712)

Summarizing the situationist view in organizational behavior, Snyder and Ickes argue for the superiority of the situationist approach. As they put it:

“Clearly, the study of personality and social behavior has seen a sequential progression from the dispositional strategy to the interactional strategy to the situational strategy. This progression has not only been one of history but also one of evolution.” (1995: 936)

So far, I have only included the work of those scholars who have explicitly defended the situationist position. There are also well documented organizational and contextual influences on individual ethical behavior (which do not deny the importance of dispositional effects). These are some of the effects that have been reported in the

management literature: (1) effects of perceptions of the organization's ethical climate (Victor and Cullen, 1988; Cullen, Victor, and Bronson, 1993; Weber, 1995); (2) effects of ethical culture (Treviño, Butterfield, and McCabe, 1998); (3) attitudes and behaviors of peers in the workplace (Zey-Ferrell and Ferrell, 1982; Brass, Butterfield, and Skaggs, 1998; Jones and Ryan, 1997; Weaver, Treviño, and Agle, 2005); (4) leadership (Treviño and Brown, 2004; Treviño, Brown, and Hartman, 2003; Brown, Treviño, and Harrison, 2005); (5) expectations on obedience to authority figures (Treviño et al., 1998, 1999; Kelman and Hamilton, 1989); (6) issue intensity (Vitell et al, 2003; Nill and Schibrowsky, 2005); (7) codes of ethics (Greenberg, 2002; Peterson, 2002; Weaver and Trevino, 1999); (8) and informal incentives (Hegarty and Sims, 1978; Tenbrunsel, 1998).⁴

4.2.3. The Situationist Argument

As a corollary of these experimental studies, Situationists conclude that personality research fails to accommodate the evidence on the basis of individual differences (Ross and Nisbett, 1991). As Doris puts it:

“Taken together, low consistency correlations, the astonishing situation sensitivity of behavior, the disappointments of personality research and the confounds of biography (...) is unquestionably awkward for virtue ethics.” (2002: 65)

It is claimed that these experiments show that situational factors that seem to have little moral significance have more explanatory power than the personal qualities we

⁴ There is also a trend in academic research in economics that rejects the consideration of individual differences in behavior in the field of economics. For instance, Stigler and Becker argue that economists should eschew explanations in terms of tastes (i.e., differing utility functions) because they are “ad hoc arguments that disguise analytical failures.” (1977: 89) But this work is not grounded in any specific empirical finding.

regard as virtues. That is taken as evidence that these personal qualities, if they exist at all, are too weak to qualify as virtues. Thus, rather than a characterological moral psychology, Doris proposes the ‘fragmentation hypothesis.’ There might be traits after all. If temporal stability obtains, Doris grants that we are justified in attributing highly contextualized dispositions. He calls them *local* traits.

And Harman (2001) makes the further remark:

“What a person with a seemingly ideal moral character will do in a particular situation is pretty much what anyone else will do in exactly that situation, allowing for random variation.”

The conclusion is pretty uncomplicated: If there are no character traits, there are no virtues, and if there are no virtues, then there are no theories of virtue to be about. In sum, Situationism challenges character-based moral theories on grounds of psychological realism. But it does not challenge the claim that virtues are not attainable for ‘normal’ human beings because the theory is too demanding, say, because only heroes and saints can attain full virtue. Rather, the situationist just denies the very possibility of building a theory on the basis of states that do not exist. Even if folk psychologists routinely explain the actions of others by appealing to character traits, there is no scientific evidence for the existence of those traits, the situationist concludes.

Then, let me unpack the situationist argument as follows,

- (1) The moral psychology that underwrites virtue ethics is dispositionalist.
- (2) Dispositionalism defends the determinative influence of robust character traits on human behavior.
- (3) Empirical data in social psychology discredit the determinative influence and the very existence of character traits on human behavior.

- (4) Therefore, empirical research discredits the dispositionalist assumptions on human behavior (and confirms Situationism).
- (5) Therefore, the moral psychology that underwrites virtue ethics is empirically inadequate.

If propositions (4) and (5) hold, virtue ethicists should dispose of character notions and abandon the very idea of a character-based moral theory. Virtue ethics would be empirically inadequate as well as normatively implausible, on grounds of psychological realism, as it was established in chapter one.

4.3. DEBUNKING SITUATIONISM

There are at least three main ways of responding to the situationist attack without giving up the language of virtue.⁵

At one extreme, the position that concedes the most to the situationist challenge would free the terminology of virtue from commitment to character by applying aretaic notions primarily to actions, attitudes, and mental states occurring at a particular time. This is the line adopted by Hurka, holding that “the concept of virtue is essentially that of a desirable state.” He suggests that in typical areas of moral concern “virtue should be found in occurrent attitudes.” (2000: 43) Similarly, Harman (1999) and Thompson (1996) advocate an unusual – to say the least – version of virtue ethics, a “Virtue Ethics without Character” as the title of a recent Harman’s article (2001).

At the other end of the spectrum, and offering the least accommodation to the situationist critique, there is the strategy of arguing that the standard conception of virtue is untouched by the experimental evidence. At least three reasons may be given for this

⁵ I am following here the taxonomy proposed by Adams (2006) but my reconstruction of the alternatives is different from his.

conclusion. The first would go along the lines of a pure aretaic theory, which aims to provide an account of the ideal moral life and the general nature of an ideally virtuous person (Taylor, 1988; Annas, 1993). This perspective is not committed to any behavioral prediction except, perhaps, the behavior of the fully virtuous person. In the second place, the classical conception of this response would be that true virtue is rare enough to leave a statistically significant footprint in psychological studies (Annas, 2003; Kamtekar, 2004, Hursthouse, 1999). The third reason for the extreme position is that the question of whether anyone has a comprehensive disposition to respond appropriately – whether she has a virtue – is heavily laden with evaluation, and thus, the evaluation will be controversial at some points, and is not likely to be convincingly operationalized by social psychologists.

Finally, the third strategy would be an intermediate position between the two extremes. It would hold that there are real moral virtues that are not extremely rare and that play a part in a wide variety of human lives. And they are not merely occurring states, even if this account allows for virtues that are fragmentary in various ways (Adams, 2006). Merritt (2000) argues that we can find real virtues in people whose character depends for its stability on social conditions that are relatively stable.

It cannot be surprising that I reject the first strategy, given the title of this dissertation (“Taking Character Seriously.”). We should not be so ready to concede the commitment to states of character as the central locus of moral evaluation. We should not give up all aspiration for the improvement of our character. And we should not give up the vocabulary of virtues, which would be exhausted by the unorthodox conception of “virtue without character traits.”

Adams (2006) favors the third strategy, whose advantage may be carried in the consideration that his taxonomy of positions already describes it as a middle-path between overly concessive responses and Aristotelian and Stoic views that make virtues vanishingly rare – by identifying them with a high-level of character integration and with a suspect claim about the unity of the virtues. Adams attempts a moderate response to the situationist attack. He acknowledges the importance of responding to two aspects of the situationist challenge. First, the problem of whether all the otherwise desirable traits of character there may be are too frail or too dependent on social and situational factors to have the excellence required for virtue. Second, the problem of whether any personal qualities we might regard as virtues have, in actual fact, sufficient generality and consistency across situations to count as traits of character. At the end, Adams concurs with the analysis provided in chapters two and three and refutes the situationist claim of the explanatory unimportance or the non-existence of traits of character. He argues that “it is very doubtful that a direct behavioral disposition is sufficient to constitute a virtue...the connection of virtue with motivation will be a recurring theme in our investigation.” (2006: 121)

My plan to respond to the situationist attack is a mixed of the second and the third strategy. For on the one hand, I do not think that the theory of virtue that I presented in chapter one is seriously undermined by the situationist data.⁶ Yet, I may not share the rationale behind the second strategy. And while I agree with the third, middle-ground position that there are – or there might be – real moral virtues which are not extremely rare and that have explanatory power, I think that recent perceptive essays by philosophers contesting the situationist claim – such as those by Sosa (2007) and Adams

⁶ But a theory of virtue that is committed to maintain the thesis of the unity of virtue may be in trouble.

(2006) – concede too much to the experimenter by failing to dispute the interpretation of the situationist data and the integration of another important body of research on dispositional effects on human behavior. I argue that there is a way to devastate the situationist argument without defending a psychologically unrealistic version of virtue ethics or an empirically unfalsifiable theory of virtue. The key is, once again, the conceptualization of virtues as behavioral dispositions and as linear traits. There are serious methodological and conceptual difficulties with the situationist evidence. This is what I intend to discuss next.

My strategy to challenge the situationist argument is twofold. First, I shall argue that the situationist argument relies on a misinterpretation of the empirical data. Second, I shall show that situationists hold a problematic notion of character traits and virtue. In other words, considering my reconstruction of the situationist argument at the end of section two, I shall first dispute premise (3) and then I shall challenge premise (1).

4.3.1. Methodological Objections

4.3.1.1. Objection 1: Ecological validity

It is widely accepted in the social sciences that a given experimental finding does not necessarily reflect phenomena found in natural contexts. Experiments are carried out to make inferences to other non-experimental situations. Hence, the experimenter observes events in a standard situation while holding constant everything other than the particular independent variable under investigation. For this technique to allow valid inferences, it is crucial that the experimental situation adequately reflects the process under investigation (Brunswik, 1956; Orne and Holland, 1968). Personality psychologists argue that there are important differences between the lab and the real world, namely,

situational factors are less powerful in natural contexts than they are in experimental contexts. Thus, experimenters tend to find much more consistency in the lab (Sreenivasan, 2002). In addition, experimental conditions may weaken dispositional traits. Buss (1989) claims that psychologists can easily create situations in which personality influences are minimized (e.g., under strong norm constraints), and other situations in which personality influences are maximized (e.g., in unstructured interactions).

Furthermore, in the experimental setting, random assignment of individuals to treatment and comparison is the gold standard for measuring causal effects. But, as a matter of fact, in real life “people are not randomly assigned to real organizations; people select themselves into and out of real organizations.” (Schneider, 1987: 440)

Consequently, people who are of a similar type will be attracted, not only to jobs, but to organizations of a particular sort. The attraction of similar types to the same place begins to determine the place. Then for a dispositionalist, people and settings are inseparable, such that it is not the case that the situation determines human behavior in organizations. Rather, similar people and their similar behavior determine the features of situations; people and their behavior select and construe the organizational situation (Schneider, 1987).

4.3.1.2. Objection 2: Inconclusive results

Subsequent variants of some of the experiments listed in the previous section show less persuasive results than those presented by Situationism. Variations in the mood effects and bystander experiments show divergent results from those obtained in the original experiments by Isen and Levin. For instance, keeping the same experimental

conditions, Blevins and Murphy (1974) found that 43% of the subjects helped in spite of failing to find any coin in the phone booth and 40% of the subjects who did find a coin in the return slot did not help the confederate. In 1975, Levin and Isen varied the coin experiment by giving subjects the opportunity to mail a stamped, addressed envelope that seemed to have been inadvertently left behind in the phone booth. Thus, subjects noticed the letter before they checked the coin return slot. They found almost the same behavior as that in the baseline condition. Yet, Weyant and Clark (1977) replicated this second version and found that 77% of the subjects who found a coin and 68% of those who did not left the letter.

In addition, there is a second version of the Good Samaritans experiments (Batson *et al.*, 1979) in which the importance of what the subject was hurrying for did make a significant difference in the results. Batson and collaborators told half of the subjects that their performance on the task awaiting them in the second building was ‘of vital importance’ to the experimenter and the other half were told that theirs was ‘not essential.’ While in the original experiment only 10% of the subjects in the rushed condition were helpers, in this variant of the experiment 70% stopped to help when they were in a hurry for something of little importance. This evidence leads to modest conclusions about the influence of the ‘hurry’ condition on helping behavior.

The results are more striking at the cross-cultural level. A study similar to Isen and Levin’s experiments was conducted cross-culturally and the results suggest that another major factor explaining behavior may be nationality. For example, 100 percent of the Brazilians in Rio de Janeiro helped retrieve a pen when a stranger dropped it, but only 31 percent of New Yorkers helped. Perhaps all the Brazilians would have helped had they

been subjects in the Isen and Levin's study, regardless of whether they found a dime (Levine, Norenzayan, and Philbrick, 2001).

Some of the classic situationist experiments have actually been conducted cross-culturally, and the results are illuminating. The Milgram study, for instance, was conducted originally in the United States. But German subjects under the same experimental conditions were considerably more obedient: 85% followed the orders of the time (Mantell, 1971). The least obedient in the Milgram studies were the Australians, who had a 28% compliance rate, where only 40% of the men and 16% of the women were fully obedient (Kilham and Mann, 1974).

It is an open (and empirical) question – to which I do not intend to respond in this chapter – why humans in different countries perform differently on the very same experiments. But the fact is that they did. Indeed, performance on the Milgram studies suggests that cross-national variance may be greater than within culture variance (Prinz, forthcoming). Character was invisible when Milgram first conducted the studies at Yale, because his sample was exclusively American.

4.3.1.3. Objection 3: Extreme and novel experimental situations

To the extent that the experimenters observed behavior under extreme situations, far removed from everyday life, lack of behavioral consistency is a weak challenge to the effect of personality traits. This is because under extreme circumstances, situations usually rule behavior, especially in the lab (Bern, 1992). The right thing to do under a plausible theory of virtue is what a person of good character would do under the circumstances. That may not be clear for the subjects of the experiments listed in the previous section. Moreover, the evidence presented by Situationism is tilted to novel

situations, in which the agent was not able to practice her ethical sensibilities (Solomon, 2003). As a result, the empirical evidence cited by situationists might not challenge the notion of cross-situationally consistent traits. Furthermore, when facing novel situations, it is not obviously easy for the agent to determine what he should do. The subject is an alien to the experimental environment. She relies on the experience of the experimenter, the specialist who decides what the experiment requires.⁷

Situationists may insist that for the dispositionalist argument to hold, virtue ethicists must be able to predict a person's performance or non-performance of particular behaviors on any given occasion, as Doris illustrates with the case of hiring a babysitter (2002: 74). I shall show why such a response is not satisfactory in the following objection.

4.3.1.4. Objection 4: Limitations of one-shot studies

The experiments did not track the behavior of particular individuals across situations on multiple occasions. In the experiments summarized above, psychologists typically observed any given individual only on one occasion in a particular situation. What can we conclude about the consistency of the subjects' behavior on the basis of a single observation? Funder (1999) acknowledges as a critical issue how to use behavioral prediction as a criterion for accuracy in personality judgment. He suggests that "one

⁷ Situationists may reply that at least in the Milgram case the objection is implausible. Subjects went on with the shocking even though they were seriously upset by it. What is so hard about knowing what one ought to do in a case like this? We have reasons to be disturbed that so many students followed the instructions of an authority figure to the point of what they thought was torturing of another human being. But the unusual circumstances of the experiment for those college students – after all, how often do they volunteer for a psychological experiment? And how often are they ordered to punish anyone? – do not challenge our moral intuitions but rather confirm that ordinary people sometimes act badly in group and institutional situations. Experiments such as Milgram's are no longer allowed and for good reason, because the feelings they provoked in the students were too painful and often with lasting damage (Solomon, 2003).

problem is that a single behavior is not always or perhaps even usually very informative about personality.” (1999: 110)

Personality psychologists argue that longitudinal studies observing individuals over a period of many years in numerous and diverse situations are needed to support the situationist thesis. Correlations between personality and behavior look higher when we compare aggregates of behavior in situations of one kind or another than when we compare single instances of behavior (Epstein, 1979). As we just saw while discussing *Objection 3*, measures of personality may not be useful in predicting behavior in any specific situation but they can predict and explain the frequency of behavior in an aggregation of situations. Assessments of single behaviors are unreliable measures, because there may be multiple causes explaining the result, as discussed in chapters two and three. Only observations of aggregated behaviors can provide substantial predictions.

Second, Situationism holds that the effect of personality on behavior is minimal because a correlation of 0.30 (Mischel, 1968) or 0.40 (Ross and Nisbett, 1991) represents the upper limit to which one can predict human behavior from personality variables. But 0.30 or 0.40 may not be that small after all. A correlation of 0.40 according to the binomial effect size display (Rosenthal and Rubin, 1982) means that a prediction of behavior based on a personality trait score is likely to be accurate 70% of the time.⁸ That can make a big difference in the long run. To illustrate, Sabini compares the personality coefficient with baseball stats. The difference between the batting average of one of the greatest hitters, Ted Williams (344), and one of the weakest, Bob Uecker (200), accounts for 0.33 % and 1% of the variance in whether these particular batters will get a hit on a

⁸ The binomial effect size display is a method that shows the practical importance of effect sizes. It is presented as the difference in outcome rates between experimental and control groups. See Rosenthal and Rubin (1982).

particular occasion. So, Mischel's correlation of 0.3 is between 3 and 27 times as predictive of particular instances of honesty and dishonesty as batting averages are predictive of whether someone will get a hit on a particular turn at bat. Yet, baseball fans know that the difference between Williams and Uecker is a big deal in the long run (Sabini and Silver, 2005: 542).

More importantly, when the experimental statistics used by social psychologists are algebraically converted into correlations of the sort used by personality psychologists, it is apparent that the effects of situations on behavior are not any bigger, statistically, than the documented size of personality traits on behavior (Funder and Ozer, 1983). For instance, in the Good Samaritans studies, whether the subject was in a hurry had a correlation of -0.38 with helping behavior. And in the Milgram's investigation, the correlation that reflects the size of the effect of victim isolation is 0.42. Hence, the argument that situational factors account for all or nearly all variation in behavior lacks empirical support. As Funder puts it, "Situational variables are important determinants of behavior, but many personality variables are important as well." (1997: 73)

4.3.1.5. Objection 5: Inferences of individual from group behavior

It is misleading to infer individual behavior from group outcomes. While some of the experiments invoked by situationists entailed multiple tests on the same subjects – e.g., Hartshorne and May's honesty studies – they did not track their behavior as individuals but instead inferred the behavior of individuals from the behavior of groups. The problem is that not all individuals in a group behave like the group average. Therefore, the claim that there are no robust character traits remains undetermined. For example, a coefficient of consistency of 0.13 between lying and stealing is an average of

all children that does not exclude there being some individuals for whom the correlation between the stealing and lying situations was much higher (Sreenivasan, 2002). What are accounted as correlations of behavioral consistency may be merely relationships between the distributions of a population's behavior in different situations; they do not reflect different behaviors performed by particular individuals.

Situationism may respond that there must be a reliable connection between intersituational and intraindividual consistency. That is, situationists might argue that if the relevant individuals are typically consistent, the population distribution in different trait-relevant situations would be strongly related. Since empirical researchers fail to see a strong relation between these distributions, they conclude we have reasons to doubt that individuals act consistently. In Doris' words:

“The best explanation of the low intersituational consistency is that intrapersonal consistency is typically low.” (2002: 63)

His argument is unsound, because the first premise does not succeed. For high behavioral correlations to be true it is required not only that the subjects are consistently honest but also that other subjects are consistently dishonest. It may be true that virtue ethicists would have us expect consistency in honesty, but by no means are they committed to predicting consistent dishonest behavior. For instance, Plato expected non-virtuous people to be “ill-balanced and unsteady.” (Lysis, 214d) Aristotle likewise shares that concern when highlighting the instability of the human condition and introducing the simile of the chameleon in his discussion of happiness (NE, 1100 b1-1100b7).

4.3.1.6. Objection 6: Inferences of adult from child behavior

The honesty studies by Hartshorne and May provide the first evidence invoked by situationists to introduce the hypothesis on the fragmentation of character (Doris, 2002:

62-63). It is central to the situationist argument. However, as explained in chapter three, it is inappropriate to infer adult behavior from child behavior, especially under a character-based moral theory, where a virtuous child is a contradiction in terms. Aristotle made that point clear:

“A youth is not a suitable student of political science; for he lacks experience of the actions in life, which are the subject and premises of our arguments. Moreover, since he tends to follow his feelings, his study will be futile and useless; for the end [of political science] is action, not knowledge.” (*EN*, 1095a5)

What can be inferred about the behavior of adults from observations of children’s inconsistent behavior? One expects children to be more impressionable, less committed to particular ideals of conduct, and less integrated than adults. If my arguments are persuasive, then the findings by Hartshorne and May cannot be taken to contribute to the assessment of behavioral consistency in adults.

Situationists may object. Indeed, when Doris discusses the use of evidence on personality derived from observations of children – with reference to the Hartshorne and May study – he acknowledges that “the studies provide limited basis for conclusions regarding consistency in adult behavior.” The studies, he says, “are important not so much for their evidential role as for the interpretive perspective they provide.” (Doris, 2002: 63) But this leads us to wonder what his evidence is in fact. He claims that “as we’ve just seen, there’s no shortage of relevant evidence in adult populations; worries about behavioral consistency have teeth without reference to the classic studies of children.” However, the preceding discussion was about evidence of situational determinants of helping behavior and Doris himself admits that this is not evidence against consistency.

4.3.1.7. *Summary: Premise (3) fails*

Taken together, the six objections challenge premise (3) and the whole situationist argument. Premise (3) fails because the empirical data give no reason whatsoever to doubt the existence of character traits or their influence on human behavior. The studies cited by the situationist involve artificial consistency, incongruous results, experimental conditions that prevent the expression of virtues, cross-sectional studies that can be unreliable, potentially misleading inferences from group behavior to individual behavior, and inappropriate inferences from child behavior to adult behavior in studies related to moral reasoning. Thus, if premise (3) fails, the conclusion that the moral psychology that underwrites virtue ethics is empirically inadequate – propositions (4) and (5) – fails as well.

4.3.2. Conceptual Objections

Building upon the conclusions of chapters two and three, in this section I shall provide four arguments to reject premise (1), namely, the claim that virtue ethicists are committed to the thesis that only character traits explain people's behavior. I shall first argue that Situationism holds a misleading notion of virtue. Second, I shall argue that the situationist experiments do not test the subjects under the appropriate eliciting conditions. Third, I shall argue that the experimental evidence does not capture the inner states that underlie behavior. And fourth, I shall defend the claim that Situationists may mistakenly attribute behavior to the wrong disposition when two (or more) traits are observationally equivalent.

4.3.2.1. *Objection 7: Virtues as behavioral dispositions*

As explained in chapter two, there are at least two dimensions of character. Situationists emphasize the behavioral aspect of virtue to the neglect of the inner dimension. If some dispositions are virtues and vices, then they will presumably be dispositions to morally good and bad behavior, respectively. In fact, we should expect those behavioral dispositions whose correlated type of behavior is defined in ethical terms to be identified as virtues and vices. Then, conceiving of courage as a behavioral disposition is to suppose that a courageous person is simply one who is disposed to behave courageously.

Eliminativism about character traits maintains the explanatory unimportance or even the non-existence of traits of character on the assumption of a reductive conception of traits. Ross and Nisbett, for example, equate personality traits with “enduring predispositions to be friendly, dependent, aggressive, or the like.” And Doris says that “to attribute a character or personality trait is to say, among other things, that someone is disposed to behave in a certain way in certain eliciting conditions.”⁹

Virtue ethicists, in contrast, highlight the importance of the inner dimension of character in defining virtue as “an inner quality of an agent and of his acts” (von Wright, 1963). Hence, the lack of behavioral consistency alleged by Situationists – which as we have just seen is unwarranted on the basis of that evidence – does not seriously harm virtue ethics because virtue ethicists are not in the business of making direct behavioral predictions on every single occasion. Virtue ethics is not just an empirical theory.¹⁰ And

⁹ The qualification “among other things” is crucial, but Doris seems to have little to say about the “other things” as he focuses overwhelmingly on behavioral dispositions.

¹⁰ And I do not think that a moral theory is either empirically testable or irreversibly unrealistic, as I hope I have made clear in chapter one.

if it were, it would not be a ‘dispositionalist’ theory but rather an ‘interactionist’ theory. In addition, even advocates of Ancient versions of virtue ethics would accept some degree of frailty in the virtues. As Kamtekar suggests, “absence of widespread consistency in helping behavior is just what virtue ethics would predict.” (Kamtekar, 2004: 466, n.30) The claim that we should aim to cultivate good character traits does not entail the empirical claim that most of us attain full virtue. We have reasons to believe that this was not even true in Aristotle’s time.

As must be evident by now, the virtues operationalized by the experimental psychologist have little to do with the conceptualization of virtue defended in chapters two and three. Situationists argue that the possession of a certain character trait X entails that X-like behavior is a necessary condition of attributing trait X to the agent. But we have seen that an X-like behavior is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to grant a virtue ascription. Moreover, it is very suspicious that a behavioral disposition is sufficient to constitute a virtue. At a minimum the agent must have a good motive for her behavior if her disposition is to count as a virtue. It is possible to have a disposition to behave honestly out of fear of the social consequences of dishonest behavior without caring at all about honesty and other people’s dignity for their own sake. Conversely, an agent may possess the virtue of gratitude without saying the words “thank you.” Or, an agent may lack the virtue of gratitude and still perform an act of gratitude. Such a badly motivated disposition may still be socially useful when compared with the alternative of lacking any disposition to honest or grateful behavior. But few – except, perhaps, Harman – will think that it is excellent enough to be regarded as a virtue.

A dispositional analysis of virtues is favored by those philosophers enrolled in mainstream moral theory and non-aretaic versions of virtue theory because they reject the primacy of character in moral theory. If virtue is merely shorthand for “being disposed to right action,” if virtues are reduced to “character traits which produce good effects” (Driver, 1996: 124), then we do not need a language of virtue at all; we already have a sophisticated deontic vocabulary. Those philosophers would identify virtue, as Frankena does, with a “tendency to do certain kinds of actions in certain kinds of situations, not just to think or feel in certain ways.” (1973: 63) But such a view, again, hardly fits with the understanding of virtue defended here. Furthermore, a dispositional account of virtue has weak explanatory power when dealing with traits that are observationally equivalent, and it is question-begging when it comes to assessing traits in the absence of behavioral manifestations associated with that trait.¹¹

Virtue ethicists should favor, I have argued, a non-reductive account of virtue, according to which character consists of higher-order desires and values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior. Although they are interrelated, these elements of character cannot be described solely in terms of one of the others. For an action to be from a state of virtue – i.e., for an action to be expressive of virtue – it must be expressive of appropriate inner states.

Notice how this objection discredits the first premise of the situationist argument.

Traditionally, personality psychologists have been concerned with how psychological

¹¹ A pattern of behavior is a component of character, but it is not the only one, as social scientists and situationists may accept. James might believe that action M would lead to T but he does not perform action M because James does not want T. Or maybe James wants T but does not believe that doing M will bring it about. Hence, it is not trivial to say that James did M because he wanted T and believed that M would bring T about. Yet, on the reductive account of virtues, the statement that a desire caused some behavior is not very informative, because a desire to do M is just a disposition to do M.

states vary across individuals, while social psychologists have been more concerned with how psychological states vary across situations. In chapters two and three I have defended the view that framing capacities and perceptions involves cognitions. Thus, there is not such a clear cut distinction between the two. This is not only consistent with traditional and contemporary virtue ethics but also with what is called the interactionist approach, where behavior is seen as the outcome of the interaction between the person and the situation, mediated by the individual's cognition of the situation.

4.3.2.2. *Objection 8: Non-unitary virtues*

Besides my unsophisticated criticisms about the use of Hartshorne and May's studies to make inferences about adult behavior, there is another objection as to what these experiments tell us on the explanatory power of character traits. The objection is concerned with the question of whether the experiments measure a right notion of the virtue of honesty and, secondly, with what kind of virtue honesty is.

Recall that Doris argues that in order to be useful, empirical investigations of cross-situational consistency should be done under "conditions of uncontroversial relevance to a trait." (Doris, 2002: 27) Assuming that traits are "behavioral dispositions that lead to trait relevant behavior in the appropriate eliciting conditions," in order to test the existence of traits we need to collect evidence on behavior under the appropriate eliciting conditions.¹²

Hartshorne and May did observe situations they thought were relevant to honesty and deception. Were they the "proper eliciting conditions" for the virtue of honesty? Sreenivasan (2002) proposes three requirements for a behavioral measure to operationalize a character trait. First, each behavioral measure must specify a response

¹² Notice that I am endorsing the assumption for the sake of the objection, only.

that represents a central case of what that trait requires. Second, the concrete situation should not have any features that defeat the reason on account of which that trait requires the response in question. Third, both the subject and the observer must agree on the characterizations of the specified responses and situations. Sreenivasan concludes that if a set of behavioral measures does not meet the requirements, the character trait it operationalizes is not eligible to be classified as a virtue (2002: 59).

Assuming that Sreenivasan's demands are appropriate, a number of the experimental situations designed by Hartshorne and May might be considered inappropriate. For instance, in one of their stealing situations they observed whether a child would pocket some change left on a table in an empty classroom. In one of the lying situations they recorded whether or not a child would lie to prevent another child from getting into trouble. In both cases, we may think that these cases are not paradigmatic cases of honesty because there are other traits relevant to the situation. For instance, in the example of the lying situation, being honest and being loyal may be observationally equivalent.

The second part of the objection is concerned with the kind of trait honesty is. The argument that low correlation coefficients in the study proved that children were not consistently honest (nor dishonest) implicitly assumes that honesty is a unitary trait. In other words, it is assumed that each child has the same propensity for cheating across situations. But personality psychologists claim to have uncovered the basic dimensions of individual differences. The exact number of basic dimensions of personality is disputed – the most widely accepted is the “big five” – but it seems that there are very few unitary traits and that honesty is not one of them. If honesty is not one of the basic dimensions,

this suggests that honesty is not a unitary trait. This means, among other things, that children might differ in their propensities to cheat in different ways, in which case we should not expect high correlation coefficients in the Hartshorne and May's study.

4.3.2.3. *Objection 9: Virtue and continence; vice and incontinence*

Second, I argue that the experimental data invoked by situationists do not capture the key distinction between incontinence and vice, and continence and virtue in the virtue ethics literature (*EN*, 1145a15-1145b14). As discussed in chapter three, virtue and vice do not constitute an exhaustive classification of states of character. Rather, they mark the end points of a spectrum of kinds of states of character, namely, heroic virtue, ordinary virtue, continence, incontinence, vice, and brutishness. The two of interest here are continence (*enkrateia*) and weakness of will (*akrasia*).

According to the standard view, a weak-willed person lacks the unity of reason and feeling that characterizes the person of true virtue. Although he does recognize and aspire to the good, he has emotions and appetites that tempt him away from the good. And unlike the continent person, the weak-willed agent gives in to temptation and, perhaps with remorse, he does what he knows to be wrong (Davidson, 1980; Audi, 1979).

Therefore, even accepting that the lack of behavioral consistency alleged by the situationist is real (the first six objections undermine such a claim), and conceding that there can be a causal connection between virtues defined as dispositions and behavior, one might explain behavioral inconsistencies with reference to cognitive and motivational obstacles to practical reason. People fail to do the right thing for the right reason either because they have wrong moral beliefs – the vicious person – or, having the right beliefs, they do not act on them – the akrates (Aristotle, *EN*, 1105a23-1105a35).

Those scholars who are exclusively concerned with observable behavior lack enough information to draw inferences about the state of character of a person from his deeds. In observing behavior, the experimenter might readily confuse the continent person with the virtuous person and the incontinent person with the vicious person.

Let me illustrate the difference between virtue and continence with a business example. The continent (*enkratic*) manager does not pay the bribe and he can be reliably counted upon not to. But he will spend the rest of his life thinking about the professional opportunities and personal pleasures he could have had if he had paid it. Conversely, the virtuous executive is not tempted by these thoughts at all; he enjoys his act of refraining from paying kickbacks because he responds not only to the right principles but also his behavior stems from the right feelings, desires, and beliefs that are relevant to the matter.

An alternative answer to the situationist puzzle is that perhaps there was no wholly virtuous person among the subjects of these experiments (Solomon, 2003; Athanassoulis, 2000). If virtue requires practical wisdom, one would expect virtuous persons to be rare.¹³ Full possession of a virtue is atypical and there are a number of ways of falling short of this ideal (*NE*, 1105b13-1105b15). Kupperman, for example, claims that “perhaps what [the experiments] show is that [the idea of virtuous character] is much rarer than most people might suppose.” (Kupperman, 2001: 243) However, the claim that virtue is rare may be problematic. If the theory of virtue I advocate involves a return to a sort of Hellenistic conception of virtue, according to which only the sage can be moral, then the charge of lack of psychological realism reappears: people must be able to become virtuous for the theory to be realistic. Yet, I think this view is overstating the

¹³ And even if virtue is rare, it can be as effective in explaining and commending as can rationality, which it resembles and entails.

significance of the situationist data. After all, even accepting these results and the situationist interpretation of them, one may conclude that there still were virtuous persons among the subjects, even under a dispositional account of virtue. 35% of the subjects were not fully obedient in the Milgram experiments. And “only” 16% of the Australian female subjects were fully obedient (Kilham and Mann, 1974). And if we need to rely on more than one observation of behavior, as I have argued in chapter three, we may recall the case of the student who was one of the Milgram disobedient subjects when the experiment was conducted at Princeton University. He was the same person who, in Vietnam, blew the whistle on the My Lai massacre (Kupperman, 2004). This move can accommodate the direct empirical critique, because the evidence does not rule out the possibility that a few people have virtuous dispositions that are reliably manifested in behavior, as we have seen in the methodological section. Still, that is not the notion of virtue I advocate.

4.3.2.4. Objection 10: Multiple Traits and Analysis of Variance

Third, once again assuming for the sake of argument that we can define virtues as behavioral dispositions and that the situationist evidence categorically refutes the dispositionalist thesis, I contend that Situationists are unable to respond to the question of the explanatory power of virtues on the grounds of the experimental data summarized in section two. They might readily attribute behavior to a wrong disposition. Or they might mistakenly attribute to situations what should be attributed to a different, conflicting disposition.

We examined in chapter three that a given behavior is due to a complex combination of personality and situational factors. And it is a truism that people have

more than one character trait. Those traits may sometimes conflict in a situation. Behavioral inconsistency may be the result not of the absence of any trait underlying behavior, but rather the result of different traits manifested in a situation. Two traits may be observationally equivalent, in which case we need observations of behavior in different situations in order to judge which one is currently displayed.

Thus, the experimental data could be read differently. Arguably, one could not be, say, a good helper if one always allowed one's helping activities to be interrupted by new calls for help. For example, we may argue that the subjects of the Good Samaritans experiment solved their conflict by choosing to help the experimenter rather than the person in the doorway. This claim is surely controversial. But I am positive that we all frequently experience the kind of situation designed by Darley and Batson. You are running late to a lecture or to a business meeting when you see someone in need. In this situation we see how a virtue – related to your commitment to give the lecture or attend the business meeting – is pitted against another virtue – associated with helping a person in distress. When two virtues are pitted against each other, the agent is forced to act, to some extent, out of character, with reference to the trait associated to the conduct he is not going to perform. In the Good Samaritans studies, subjects may decide that it is rational not to aid a person in need. Of course we must assume that the situation under consideration is not one of agony, for example, Peter Singer's example of the drowning child.

Solomon (2005) has defended a similar claim regarding the Milgram experiments. He argues that the subjects might have had – in addition to a disposition to avoid cruelty – a disposition to obey or to cooperate with the experimenter. So, Solomon claims there

is a more robust disposition than compassion, a disposition that is more prominent in this unusual experimental situation, namely, obedience to authority. Solomon argues that virtually everyone had been brought up with this virtue whereas compassion is “a virtue more often praised than practiced, except on specially designated occasions.” (2003: 53)¹⁴ Still, the lack of evaluative distinction between the duties to the experimenter and those to the victims makes this case more problematic than the Good Samaritans situation. For, as it was argued in chapter three, a key aspect of good character in the virtue ethics tradition is the ability to prioritize correctly, something that apparently most Milgram subjects lacked.¹⁵ In addition, the Milgram subjects have not explained or excused their behavior by saying that they thought that obedience was such an important virtue.

The multiplicity of traits and their observational equivalence poses a big problem for Situationism. The realization that the correspondence between traits and behavior is not one-to-one but many-to-one, as discussed in chapter three, leads to the conclusion that situationists might be just looking at the wrong trait.

If successful, this objection is particularly forceful for the situationist interpretation of the experiments. Situationists determined the power of the situation to predict behavior by subtraction. That is, if it was found that a personality variable correlated 0.40 with a behavioral measurement and hence, it explained 16% of the

¹⁴ One may resist that cooperation with the experimenter, obedience to authority, and anticipation of embarrassment are the right dispositions to explain the situationist evidence. Surely, obedience is not always a virtue. That is proven by the subjects’ reactions. Most subjects acted against their dispositions, they felt bad about their deeds both during and after the experiment. It has even been said that they considered their own acts as aberrant (Milgram, 1974; Blass, 1991). Indeed, a careful review of the Milgram experiments on obedience to authority reveals that there was considerable variation in the reactions of those subjects who administered the shocks to a confederate. Milgram found “striking reactions of tension and emotional strain” (Milgram, 1963: 376) that may point to character traits. If the argument in chapter Three is persuasive, emotional reactions are considered crucial for the attribution of virtue and vice.

¹⁵ I thank Steve Stich for raising this point.

variance, then the other 84% was assigned by default to the situation (Mischel, 1968). As any statistician will readily confirm, such a methodological practice is deeply wrong. It would be equally reasonable to attribute the missing variance to other personality variables that the experimenter did not measure – the sort of personal (and perhaps situational) variables we have stressed in chapters two and three. Assigning variance by subtraction does not help us to understand which situational variables are important in a way parallel to how personality measures tell the experimenter which aspects of personality are important (Funder, 1997). Therefore, situationists are not entitled to make inferences about the relative contribution of personality and situational measures to behavior on the basis of these findings.

4.3.2.5. Summary: Premise (1) fails

In this section, I have posed four conceptual objections to the first premise of the situationist argument. First, I have argued that the experiments inappropriately conceptualize virtues as behavioral dispositions. Second, I have disputed the design of the eliciting conditions of virtue in some of the situationist experiments. Third, I gave reasons why the experimental evidence under analysis does not support any inference about the state of character of the subjects. Fourth, I have disputed the situationist practice of assigning variance by subtraction for traits that are observationally equivalent. Therefore, if my objections hold, premise (1) of the situationist argument fails.

4.3.3. Reprise: The Failure of Situationism

Recall that,

- (1) The moral psychology that underwrites virtue ethics is dispositionalist;
- and

(3) Empirical data in social psychology discredit the determinative influence and the very existence of character traits on human behavior.

If my arguments are compelling, neither premise (1) nor premise (3) succeeds. Premise (1) does not hold because virtues are more than behavioral dispositions, because the eliciting situations designed by the experimenter may be ambiguous, because the problem of *akrasia* makes it very difficult to infer virtues from actions, and because situationists wrongly assign variance by subtraction. And premise (3) does not hold because lab studies show artificial consistency, the experimental results are incongruous, the experimental conditions prevented the expression of virtues, cross-sectional studies are not reliable, inferences of individual behavior from group behavior may be misleading, and inferences of adult behavior from child behavior are incorrect. Therefore, propositions (4) and (5) do not succeed. Consequently, the Situationist argument collapses. And virtue ethics does not need to dispose of aretaic notions in order to accommodate the evidence in experimental social psychology.

4.4. DISPOSITIONAL EFFECTS IN ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Recall Harman's position:

“What a person with a seemingly ideal moral character will do in a particular situation is pretty much what anyone else will do in exactly that situation, allowing for random variation.” (2001: 122)

In this section, I shall respond to Harman's thesis by briefly reporting a body of literature on dispositional effects in psychology and organizational scholarship. The purpose of this section is to prove that there is enough evidence documenting the effects

of individual characteristics in behavior to disprove Harman's empirical claim.¹⁶ But it is not my aim to defend the claim that those dispositional effects represent the virtues or make an empirical case for the relevance of character in experimental psychology. Indeed, the sort of objections I have raised against Situationism may well apply to the findings I shall report in this section.

Harman does not provide the evidence to support his bold claim. Indeed, in the areas of the two most-widely cited experiments discussed by situationists, the Milgram studies on obedience to authority and the Good Samaritans experiments, research has shown that there are indeed individual differences and that there is cross-situational consistency. For example, Elms and Milgram (1966) found a significant difference in authoritarianism (F-scores) between obedient and defiant participants. Kohlberg (1969) also found that individuals at higher stages of moral development were more likely to disobey than those at lower moral stages. Blass also observes that moral development has been shown to have some relationship to obedience (1991: 403). Dispositional effects in studies on obedience to authority have been reported also by Elms (1972), Sabini and Silver (1983), and Cialdini and Goldstein (2004). Moreover, in a study related to obedience and conformity experiments, Crutchfield found a correlation of 0.39 between F-scale scores and conformity (1955: 194). In management, in a study of a group of lower-level company management staff, Haas found a correlation of 0.52 between a dispositional measure of hostility and tendencies toward workplace obedience involving firing decision (1966, p. 34).

Organizational scholars have also found various dispositional effects unrelated to obedience. For example, level of cognitive moral development has been found to

¹⁶ I am indebted to Chao Chen and Danielle Warren for pressing this point.

influence ethical decision-making (Ashkanasy, Windsor, and Treviño, 2006; Trevino and Youngblood, 1990). An affective disposition has been found to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction (Staw *et al.*, 1986). Collectivist and individualistic dispositions have been found to have different levels of behavioral consistency (Chatman and Barsade, 1995). Emotional stability, extraversion, and conscientiousness have been found to predict job performance (Barrick and Mount, 1991). An individual's self-concern and others' concern and levels of aspiration-differentiation have been found to predict negotiation behavior (Chen, Mannix, and Okumura, 2003). Openness to experience has been found to predict training proficiency (Barrick and Mount, 1991). Locus of control has been shown to be linked to ethical behavior (Forte, 2005). An individual's ego strength (Treviño, 1986) has been linked theoretically to moral behavior. Individual capacities for self-regulation have been linked to ethically relevant outcomes (Eisenberg, 2000).

Studies on moral awareness demonstrate that females are more morally aware (Ameen, Guffey, and McMillan, 1996; Bebeau and Brabeck, 1987; Chonko and Hunt, 1985; Singhapakdi, Rao, and Vitell, 1996; Chonko and Hunt, 1985). There is also some evidence that nationality and culture play a role in moral awareness (Cherry *et al.*, 2003; Singhapakdi, Karande, Rao, and Vitell, 2001). Age (Singhapakdi *et al.*, 1996), spiritual values (Singhapakdi, Marta, *et al.*, 2000), professional training (Clarkeburn, 2002; Castleberry, 2007); professional experience (Sparks and Hunt, 1998; Cohen *et al.*, 2001), formal education (Bebeau, 1994; Swenson-Lepper, 2005), positive affect and arousal (Gaudine and Thorne, 2001), and job satisfaction (Yetmar and Eastman, 2000) have all

been found to be correlated with moral awareness. Moral disengagement has been linked with moral awareness and moral judgment (Detert, Trevino, and Sweitzer, 2008).

The literature on values and orientations indicates that people's "ethical orientation" appears to be an important consideration in moral awareness. "Utilitarians" were found to be less ethically sensitive than people who hold deontological values in the domain of violations of behavioral norms (Reynolds, 2006). Similarly, relativism and idealism were found to be associated with lower levels of moral awareness (Shaub, Finn and Munter, 1993; Sparks and Hunt, 1998).

There is also a large body of literature on ethical decision-making where dispositional effects have been widely reported. The following is a brief summary of the findings. Regarding gender, women have been found to make more ethical judgments (e.g., Cole and Smith, 1996; Eynon, Hill, and Stevens, 1997; Mason and Mudrack, 1996; Okleshen and Hoyt, 1996; Reiss and Mitra, 1998; Tse and Au, 1997) and to have more ethical intentions (e.g., Cohen, Pant, and Sharp, 2001; Singhapakdi, 1999; Valentine and Rittenburg, 2007). Most studies have found that women behave more ethically (e.g., Chung and Trivedi, 2003; Glover, Bumpus, Logan, and Ciesla, 1997; Ross and Robertson, 2003; Sankaran and Bui, 2003). A fair number of studies have found a connection between nationality and judgment (e.g., Allmon, Chen, Pritchett, and Forrest, 1997; Armstrong, 1996; Cherry et al., 2003; Christie, Kwon, Stoeberl, and Baumhart, 2003; Clarke and Aram, 1997; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1999; Hegarty and Sims, 1978; Jackson, 2001; McDonald and Pak, 1996; Okleshen and Hoyt, 1996; Singhapakdi et al., 2001; Tsui and Windsor, 2001; Haidt, Koller, and Dias, 1993). A connection between nationality and intent has also been reported (e.g., Cherry et al., 2003; Singhapakdi et al.,

2001; Volkema and Fleury, 2002), as well as a connection between nationality and behavior (e.g., Kennedy and Lawton, 1996; Whitcomb, Erdener, and Li, 1998) and a correlation between cultural differences and justification of unethical actions (Vitell et al., 2003; Haidt et al., 1993; Parboteeah, Bronson, and Cullen, 2005).

Furthermore, religion appears to be positively associated with moral judgment (e.g., Clark and Dawson, 1996; Razzaque and Hwee, 2002; Wagner and Sanders, 2001; Wimalasiri et al., 1996), intention (e.g., Singhapakdi, Marta, et al., 2000), and behavior (e.g., Kennedy and Lawton, 1996). A number of studies report a negative relationship between age and judgment (e.g., Eynon et al., 1997; Kracher et al., 2002; Latif, 2000; Roozen et al., 2001; Slovackova and Slovacek, 2007) and a positive correlation between age and behavior (e.g., Hunt and Jennings, 1997; Kim and Chun, 2003; Lund, 2000). Work and educational experience have been found to be negatively related to judgment (e.g., Elm and Nichols, 1993; Kaynama, King, and Smith, 1996; Latif, 2000, 2001; Patenaude, Niyonsenga, and Fafard, 2003; Ponemon, 1990 and 1992; Reiss and Mitra, 1998; Slovackova and Slovacek, 2007; Tse and Au, 1997), and other studies found age positively related to judgment (e.g., Chow and Choi, 2003; Cole and Smith, 1996; Kracher et al., 2002; Larkin, 2000; Razzaque and Hwee, 2002; Smith and Oakley, 1997; Weeks et al., 1999). The same can be said regarding studies on intent and behavior, where positive correlations (e.g., Cohen et al., 2001) and negative correlations (e.g., Chavez, Wiggins, and Yolas, 2001) have been reported.

Mantel (2005) has found positive affect linked to ethical decisions. An association between positive mood and more heuristic processing has been reported by Bodenhausen,

Kramer, and Susser (1994). And Ambady and Gray (2002) found that more elaborate processing can lead to less accurate judgments and decisions under certain circumstances.

Finally, values and orientations have been found related to judgments, intentions, and behavior (e.g., Barnett, Bass, and Brown, 1996; Bass, Barnett, and Brown, 1998, 1999; Boyle, 2000; Davis et al., 1998; DeConinck and Lewis, 1997; Elias, 2002; Forsyth, 1985; Rallapalli, Vitell, and Barnes, 1998; Schminke, Ambrose, and Noel, 1997; Shapeero, Koh, and Killough, 2003; Singhapakdi, Salyachivin, et al., 2000; Sivadas, Kleiser, Kellaris, and Dahlstrom, 2003; Tang and Chiu, 2003).

It is worth noting that several studies that have not been mentioned in this review have reported the opposite effects. For example, Weeks, Moore, McKinney, and Longenecker, (1999) found males to have more ethical judgment and Chow and Choi (2003) report a positive effect between age and moral judgment. This review is merely illustrative and definitively incomplete.

In the same vein, economists have found correlations between personality classifications and morally relevant behaviors. For instance, the evidence on experimental economics shows that subjects who are put in the same experimental situation in public good games and trust games exhibit different behavior. Some individual differences such as social value orientation (Offerman, Sonnemans, and Schram, 1996) and Machiavellianism (Gunnthorsdottir, McCabe, and Smith, 2002; Burks, Carpenter, and Verhoogen, 2003; Guerra and Zizzo, 2004) could serve as an explanation of this finding.

In short, there is a sizable amount of evidence reporting dispositional effects on human behavior that has not been incorporated into the situationist analysis. Those

experimental findings provide some support for the dispositionalist position. And they discredit the thesis of eliminativism about traits from an empirical perspective.

Once again, I should emphasize that it is not part of my project to defend the claim that those dispositional effects reflect the influence of virtue on behavior or to make the empirical case for the relevance of character in experimental psychology. For I may have the same sort of reservations with reference to how virtue is conceptualized in these studies.

4.5. PERSON–SITUATION INTERACTIONISM

In this section, I shall draw the most important lessons from the previous discussion and explore the implications of my conclusion for organizational ethics.

One may say that if Situationism is proven right, firms should be more concerned with promoting the implementation of external regulations to create a structure of incentives that favors ethical behavior, rather than investing in ethical education and training (Holmstrom, and Milgrom, 1994). Such a policy would entail increasing the effectiveness of control systems and intensifying sanctions and the enforcement of corporate rules. If, as Situationism predicts, people behave according to the external inducement that the organizational situation elicits, issues of recruitment and training would be unimportant (Davis-Blake and Pfeffer, 1986). Another lesson to be drawn from the empirical evidence is about corporate hiring policies. Many employers are convinced that useful information can be gained from interviewing potential employees. However, for the most part, interviews simply add noise to the decision process: empirical studies indicate that decisions made on information available apart from an interview are more

reliable than decisions made when an interview is added. (Ross and Nisbett, 1991, pp. 136-138)

A further consequence of Situationism, at the micro-level, would be the proliferation of excuses to avoid moral responsibility for the negative consequences of one's conduct. A wrongdoer may argue that we should blame the situation – the organizational structure, for example – rather than himself for his behavior. Ultimately, the situationist argument not only challenges virtue ethics but also the folk notions of free will and moral responsibility. But it is not just that excuses proliferate. One may argue that after all, situationist moral psychology does not help to make better predictions of human behavior. For Situationism offers such a modest account that the most we can expect is the indeterminate prediction that some “subtle situational forces” will rule behavior.

In a situationist world, we only know that we are not in control and that we will likely act under excusing conditions, but we do not know what those conditions are. And, if we finally do not succumb to the situational temptations, there is nothing especially admirable about such a behavior, according to Situationism. We are not entitled to enjoy or to take credit for what we do from virtue, because ultimately, our morally praiseworthy actions will all be explained with reference to external inducements rather than to excellent internal states.

At the other end of the spectrum, personality psychologists have found important effects of personality variables on human behavior, as explained in the previous section. And organizational scholars have found dispositional effects in the corporate setting, especially concerning issues of ethical decision-making. On these grounds, a number of

psychologists (e.g., Schneider et al., 1998) have adopted a dispositionalist approach. They believe that personality is the fundamental determinant of behavior, because in the end, it is the people that make organizations as they are. According to this view, the organization should not be seen as coming before the individual but merely as its creation. And they reject the situationist argument on the grounds that “if behavior is completely determined by acculturation, ... then choice, purpose, and conscious adaptation are meaningless.” (Jensen and Meckling, 1994:11)

The person-situation debate was originally summarized by Kurt Lewin using the equation $B = f(P,S)$, where behavior is a function of both personality and situational factors. Conversely, the dispositionalist equation looks different: $S = f(P,B)$. That is, people cause organizations to be what they are. As Schneider puts it, “the people make the place.” (Schneider, 1987) Dispositionalism in organizational behavior entails a commitment to focus on the differences *between* organizations rather than the differences among people *within* the organization. They argue that attraction to, selection by, and attrition from organizations yields particular kinds of person; they determine people’s behavior. Dispositionalism relies on the assumption that people leave the organization if they do not fit. Hence, those who remain in the organization are very similar and behave in similar ways.

Now, if the dispositionalist thesis were validated, a different set of priorities would emerge. The organizational processes of selection and socialization should be considered as complementary rather than incompatible, because each would reinforce the other. And organizational design and organizational development would be less regarded. According to a pure version of Dispositionalism, the best method for organizational

change would be relocation (Moran and Ghoshal, 1996). For example, if a firm is concerned about the implications of the experimental evidence on obedience to authority in the Milgram experiments, and if the results of Hornstein's studies on managerial courage are approximately accurate, firms should not hire managers who have children because, according to the evidence, they are particularly unlikely to challenge their superiors on any issue (Hornstein, 1986). These kind of policies might create legal problems of recruitment, given that firms would hire employees based on personal characteristics that do not have a direct impact on performance. Finally, one possible cost of dispositional approaches might be that they would excuse individuals from the consequences of their actions and the systems they design, given the problem of moral luck (Davis-Blake and Pfeffer, 1986; Adams, 2006).¹⁷

What I shall defend here is the conventional view that the truth lies somewhere in between. Traditionally, personality psychologists have investigated how psychological states vary across individuals, while social psychologists have investigated how psychological states vary across situations. A middle way position between Situationism and Dispositionalism in organizational ethics entails a synthetic theory of behavior according to which both situations and personality characteristics influence people's behavior in organizations. As Moran and Ghoshal put it:

“We believe that in social organizations, disposition and situation evolve interdependently in an iterative manner, each influencing and being influenced by the other. Denial of this interaction in any theory makes the theory ad hoc and incomplete; it is ad hoc because, from a purely dispositionalist perspective, for example, there is no basis other than the theorist's personal disposition – essentially his or her personal values and ideology – for choosing the focal traits among the many different and

¹⁷ That objection against dispositional theories is misplaced. As explained in chapters one and three, under a plausible theory of virtue a person is responsible for the sort of person she is, the sort of life she lives, and the sort of character traits she acquires, possesses, and retains.

often contradictory elements of human nature, and it is incomplete because a theory premised on either a purely dispositionalist or a purely situationalist view tends to be static.” (1996: 60)

In sum, no persons *or* situations but persons *and* situations and persons *in* situations (Chatman, 1989; Chatman and Barsade, 1995; Funder, 1997). There can be external regulation. And there can be ethical education. Both. Creating a certain sort of corporate culture is arguably a third option, which has more to do with virtues than with principles.

Interactionism was developed in response to the type of studies that are cited in section two as evidence that situations are more important than personalities in causing behavior (e.g. Mischel, 1973; Bandura, 1986; Magnusson and Endler, 1977; Cantor and Zirkel, 1990; Magnusson, 1990). Under the interactionist approach, behavior is seen as the outcome of an interaction between the person and the situation. Situational variables are important determinants of behavior. But character traits exist and make a difference. A fair review of the literature reveals that the predictability of behavior from personality variables is higher than acknowledged and that a correlation of 0.40 is bigger than situationists recognize.¹⁸ The interactionist approach attempts to reconcile these views and establish when and to what extent personality and situational factors account for more variation in behavior (Chatman, 1989). Interactionism entails, at the meso level, that organizations are not simply a given, as in the situationist view. But they are not just a creation of their members either, as in the dispositionalist approach. They attract a restricted range of people. So, we can identify two kinds of interaction: the first is that of

¹⁸ Another way to avoid the person-situation dichotomy is by saying that situational explanations and individual differences explanations of social behavior do not compete with each other but answer two different questions. Whereas situational factors explain aggregate behaviors, individual differences explain variations within the aggregate. Thus, the power of the situation cannot undermine the value of individual difference explanations. And evidence for a genetic basis of individual differences cannot undermine situational explanations of behavior either. On the plausibility of this move, see Malle (1997).

a person who has a certain moral character with an organization, the second is the interaction of a person with an organization that affects the person's character. An organization can affect an agent who has a certain character without changing the agent's character, or it can change the agent's character. And it is alleged that some individuals can change an organization's character, though I do not think it makes any sense to speak of organizations having moral character.¹⁹ As a result, the members of the organization are not only responsible for their behavior, for performing particular actions but also for the creation and the continued operation of an organizational system of goals, decision-making, and controls that influence their behavior.

As I suggested in section three, contrary to the first premise of the situationist argument, virtue ethics does not rely on a dispositionalist moral psychology but rather on an interactionist account of human behavior. Virtue ethicists are so ready to accept the influence of the environment on our behavior that their analysis of individual differences involves framing capacities and cognitions: there is not such a clear cut distinction between the person and situation in virtue ethics. The impact of external variables on behavior depends on the subjective meaning that the actor attaches to that situation. Ross and Nisbett have found noticeable variability in the construal of the situation (1991: 11). Though they do not consider individual differences in construal as a stable source of personality differences, construal might be seen as part of what it means to possess a character trait. For, as we have seen in chapter two, a person of good character, among

¹⁹ Organizational theorists do make this sort of claims. And some virtue ethicists maintain that it makes sense to attribute virtues to business firms (Moore, 2005, 2007, 2009). Such a position rests on a categorical mistake but unfortunately I lack the space here to articulate my views on the subject of so-called corporate character.

other things, does perceive a situation correctly by grasping its morally salient dimensions.

4.6. CONCLUSIONS

Skepticism (or eliminativism) about the existence of character traits, supported by experimental social psychology, questions whether we can take such a naïve view of what it is for someone to have a virtue. The situationist challenge is, after all, an objection from psychological realism. The empirical evidence casts doubts on the extent to which people's reactions depend on situations. We all act in ways that express a given virtue only within a very narrow range of recognized contexts. If the usual expectations are suspended or even slightly shifted, we may not behave in the expected style.

Should virtue ethics dispose of character traits as situationists demand? No. In response to the situationist attack, I disputed the first and third premise of the situationist argument. And I posed six methodological objections and four conceptual objections to the claim that there are no robust character traits or that they do not make any significant contribution to the explanation of behavior whatsoever. I have concluded that the moral psychology that underlies virtue ethics can be rescued from the situationist challenge without denying that both dispositions and situations (and the interactions between them) shape human behavior.

The empirical challenge on virtue ethics has not been successful in proving that virtue ethics – at least the theory of virtue anticipated in chapter one – is psychologically unrealistic. The situationist argument fails because virtue ethics is incorrectly reconstructed as a dispositionalist theory and because the empirical evidence does not truly discredit the determinative influence of traits on human behavior. Building upon the

conclusions of chapters two and three, I have argued that Situationism holds an inappropriate concept of virtue. Furthermore, the empirical data from experimental psychology do not discredit either the dispositionalist approach or virtue ethics.

It might be replied that none of the objections revisited in section three poses an unbeatable threat for Situationism, but, taken together, these objections seriously challenge the situationist thesis and present a much more charitable view of the moral psychology that underlies virtue ethics.

The main lesson virtue ethicists – and moral theorists in general – should take from the situationist experiments is that human beings may be weaker than we expect, especially when confronted with a resolute authority, a unanimous group that sees the world in a radically different ways than they do, or an intense situation that elicits “counter-dispositional” behaviors. Our weakness is not just cognitive – i.e., situational pressures make us lose our moral compass – but also motivational.

But virtue ethics, I conclude, can account for the experimental evidence, without abandoning character and virtues. Everyone knows that virtues do not express themselves under all circumstances. We all know that agents may fail in their ability to understand how a situation is to be framed in terms of virtues.

There are lessons in the empirical evidence, I was saying. For moral philosophy in general. For the heirs of Aristotle and Anscombe in particular. The lessons need not be negative. The points about the situational sensitivity of the virtues and their ascription serve to remind us that a person’s character depends in many different ways on their relations to society. Not just in the virtues being acquired from the community and

reinforced or weakened by communal forces, but also in the ways in which they are cultivated from socially shared materials.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROLE VIRTUES

“...there is nothing better than my station and its duties, nor anything higher or more truly beautiful.”

F. H. Bradley (1927: 202)

Thompson: *What’s going on here, Lieutenant?*

Calley: *This is my business.*

Thompson: *What is this? Who are these people?*

Calley: *Just following orders.*

Thompson: *Orders? Whose orders?*

Calley: *Just following...*

Thompson: *But, these are human beings, unarmed civilians, sir.*

Calley: *Look Thompson, this is my show. I’m in charge here. It ain’t your concern.*

Thompson: *Yeah, great job.*

Calley: *You better get back in that chopper and mind your own business.*

Thompson: *You ain’t heard the last of this!*

From *The Forgotten Hero of My Lai: The Hugh Thompson Story* (Angers, 1999: 119)

If my arguments so far are sound, I have made the case for the existence of personal qualities such as desires, values, beliefs, framing capacities, and patterns of behavior that are candidates for moral evaluation, even if they are not defined in terms of behavioral dispositions and even when they do not bear a direct correspondence with any particular behavior. We have not found any compelling objection to regarding some of them as virtues or vices.

However, they are not the only types of personal qualities that characterize persons in morally significant ways. There is one dimension of human life that includes actual social relationships, many of which are persistent features of the moral structure of

those lives. People often characterize themselves and others in terms of their affiliations and social and professional roles, as the empirical research on social identity theory and group identification illustrates (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail 1994; Albert, Ashforth, and Dutton, 2000; Ashforth and Johnson 2001).

These affiliations and social roles play an important part in constituting moral character. Institutional roles and affiliations are often very persistent and morally central attributes of human individuals. And, I shall contend, they are part of moral virtues. They significantly and pervasively contribute to shaping people's behavior and attitudes. We can be better persons together in a way that we cannot by ourselves, by engaging in common projects and institutional commitments. However, treating these qualities associated to roles as traits of character blurs the line between the person and the situation, which carries the puzzling implication that the determinants of virtue and vice often do not lie entirely within the inner states and the actions of the person.

Character evaluation is, in sum, not purely internal to the individual but also depends on the external dimension of social roles and institutional commitments. As explained in chapter one, a virtuous person is a good family member, a good friend, and a good citizen. We may add a good doctor, a good pianist, a good soccer player, a good COO and so on. Role virtues are an essential part of what it means to be a good person. The problem is that the demands of these roles allegedly conflict with ordinary morality.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, I aim to highlight the limitations of action-based moral theories to deal with the problem of the conflicting injunctions of role and ordinary morality. Second, I intend to show how a virtue ethical account of roles provides a superior account on the coexistence and complementarities of professional

roles, social affiliations, and universal values, because their demands can be integrated into harmonized selves and consistent standards of goodness.

The chapter is organized into seven parts. In section one, I shall outline the problem of role morality. In section two, I shall explore the nature and moral status of institutional roles, describing in greater detail corporate roles and professional positions and their corresponding demands as they pertain to the inquiry. In section three, I shall examine the conflict between role obligations and obligations *qua* persons and advance the argument that the literature on role morality does not provide a satisfactory answer to that conflict. In section four, I shall introduce three strategies to avoid the role quandaries. In section five, I shall sketch a character-based account of roles and argue that role virtues are not typically in conflict with ordinary virtues. In section six, I shall examine two objections to my account and sketch a preliminary reply to the objections. Section seven concludes.

5.1. MY STATION AND ITS VIRTUES

In “From Where to Eternity,” the twenty-second episode of the American television drama *The Sopranos*, Mafia boss Tony Soprano discusses with his psychiatrist Dr. Melfi whether he would go to hell for his crimes. He believes he is not the type that deserves hell. Hell according to Tony Soprano, is for

“...the worst people. The twisted and demented psychos who kill people for pleasure...the degenerate bastards that molest and torture little kids. They kill babies, the Hitlers...those are the evil fucks that deserve to die... We’re soldiers. Soldiers don’t go to hell. It’s war. Soldiers... they kill other soldiers. We’re in a situation where everybody involved knows the stakes. And if you’re gonna accept those stakes... You gotta do certain things. It’s business, we’re soldiers. We follow codes... Orders.”

Behavior that would be otherwise morally impermissible is allegedly justified as part of the injunctions of institutional positions and professional roles. The question of the justification and limitations of role morality has a rich philosophical pedigree, not only in the realm of occupational roles. For role ethics cuts across institutional and social roles as diverse as carpenter, parent, friend, teacher, and so on.

The *Sopranos* dialogue echoes Charles Fried's starting question of one of the most influential articles on legal ethics, namely, "Can a good lawyer be a good person?" (Fried, 1976) Three decades ago, in a famous *Harvard Business Review* article, Albert Z. Carr aimed to respond to the same question in the realm of business by arguing that businessmen in their office lives cease to be private citizens and become game players "who must be guided by a somewhat different set of ethical standards." (1972: 145) Similarly, philosophers of science have posed the question "Is the good scientist necessarily a good person?" (Caruana, 2006:7)

Early discussions in business and professional ethics have been structured around moral dilemmas in professional and corporate positions. Those cases illustrate the alleged fundamental tensions between the obligations incumbent upon businesspeople and professionals as occupants of institutional roles and what would otherwise be the demands of ordinary morality (Bowie, 1982; Goldman, 1980; Werhane, 1985). A lawyer may be allowed to brutally cross-examine innocent witnesses for the other side, an accountant may be permitted to use a reporting methodology that that can restructure the financial holdings of the firm so as to reduce tax liability, a doctor may be allowed to withhold the truth when the truth worsens the patient's medical prognosis, an executioner may be required to execute a possibly innocent person. The recent wave of corporate

scandals has renewed the interest in the rights and obligations attached to corporate and professional roles, especially in the roles played by accountants and lawyers as “gatekeepers” in these latest corporate fraud scandals, from Enron to Satyam (Boatright, 2007; Coffee, 2006). There is also a longstanding concern with the question of whether business managers can be regarded as professionals (Donaldson, 2000; Khurana, 2007).¹

One central dimension of our moral life is the life we live through social institutions. Social relationships are persistent features of the moral structure of our lives. We define ourselves with reference to our social, professional, and institutional affiliations. And these affiliations and social roles play an important part in constituting moral character. They contribute to shape our behavior and our attitudes. We can be better and happier persons together in a way that we cannot by ourselves.

In sum, we all participate in one way or another in a number of social institutions. We play social and organizational roles as members of those institutions and as members of professions. Each role brings with it a number of special responsibilities to perform certain tasks. As Tony Soprano puts it, to begin a job is to enter a situation where everybody involved knows the stakes; “if you're gonna accept those stakes... You gotta do certain things.”

The problem then, is that either those “things” characteristically conflict with the “things” we have to do *qua* human beings or they do not. If they do not conflict, the very concept of role morality is senseless; roles would not carry any moral weight over and

¹ Even if many would agree that business roles are not, strictly speaking, professional roles, they are still institutional roles. I believe I have Hardimon (1994) on my side. One may say that there is a fundamental difference between professional responsibility and job-related responsibility. Without denying that there might be differences, this chapter is concentrated in what they have in common. I argue that both professional and corporate roles create for role occupants the sort of situations that are described in the literature as the problem of role morality.

above the injunctions of ordinary morality. In contrast, if one's responsibilities come into conflict, then we must respond to the question of how to deal with these tensions and whether there is a higher morality that supersedes role morality. Those questions are still central to business ethics research. We shall start the investigation by looking at the concept of roles, the definition of professions, and the commitments that are attached to these positions.

5.2. ROLES, PROFESSIONS, AND MORALITY

What is a role? Who counts as a professional? The anthropological, sociological, and psychological literature on role theory is profuse. The concept of role is one of the most popular ideas in the social sciences (Biddle, 1986). Sociological theories highlight different components of roles. Different branches of role theory provide various conceptualizations of what a role is. Functional role theory conceives of roles as the shared normative expectations that prescribe and explain the characteristic behaviors of persons who occupy social positions within a stable social system (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951). Symbolic interactionism lays stress on the roles of individual actors, the evolution of roles through social interaction, and the cognitive concepts used by social actors to interpret their own and others' conduct (Mead, 1934). Structuralism understands roles in the context of "social structures," stable organizations of sets of persons who share the same patterned behaviors directed towards other sets of persons in the structure (Levy, 1952; Mandel, 1983). Organizational role theory (Kahn, Wolfe and Quinn, 1964) focuses primarily on the roles of formal organizations, which are task-oriented, planned and hierarchical. Finally, cognitive role theory is concerned with the relationships between role expectations and behavior (Moreno, 1934).

In the philosophical literature, a role is defined as a “constellation of institutionally specified rights and duties organized around an institutionally specified social function.” (Hardimon, 1994: 334) A role is also “a capacity in which someone acts in relation to others.” (Emmet, in Werhane, 1985: 95) Building upon the philosophical and sociological literature on role theory, business ethicists identify customary, legal, and moral elements of a role (Bowie, 1982).

What kind of roles? A variety of social and institutional roles brings with it a diverse host of special obligations. Some of those positions are natural: I am my mother's son, I am my sister's brother, and I am an Argentinean citizen. I was born into those roles. The biological or legal relationship does not exhaust the issue of whether I am a good son, a good brother, or a good citizen.² In contrast, other positions are non-natural, voluntary roles.³ Within a corporation, every person has a position, from the CEO to the sales person, to the assembly-line worker, to the public relations specialist, to the janitor. In this chapter, I am primarily concerned with those occupational roles, though some of its conclusions can be extended to the realm of natural roles.⁴

A profession, on the other hand, is defined not only as a way of making a living, as a job, but also as one in which the practitioners have a fiduciary duty to follow certain standards; that is, “special obligations to be distinguished from those of purely personal morality, or from general obligations to human beings as such.”(Emmet in Bowie, 1982:

6) Among the characteristic features of a profession, there is the existence of “a standard

² On the relation between biological and moral roles see Bernard Williams (1981).

³ For the important discussion of whether our “noncontractual” moral duties and obligations are or are not voluntarily assumed see Hardimon (1994) and Luban (1988).

⁴ Indeed, Chao Chen has suggested to me that the literature on organizational justice shows that as a matter of fact the conflicts between ordinary morality and natural (or non-contractual) obligations are more problematic than the conflicts between ordinary morality and corporate or contractual roles.

of conduct governing the relationship of the practitioner with clients, colleagues, and the public,” the “acceptance of social responsibility inherent in an occupation endowed with the public interest,” and “an organization devoted to the advancement of the social obligations of the group.” (Duska and Duska, 2003: 66) The practitioner of a profession has special technical skills that the client does not possess. This asymmetry places the professional in a special moral relationship with his or her client (Pellegrino, 1983; see also Larson, 1977 and Hanlon, 1998). One characteristic of certain professions, such as accounting, engineering and the legal profession, is that a duty to the public over and above that to one’s employer is crucial to one’s work. An auditor is a kind of watchdog.

It is widely thought that special roles and professions create special moral rights and duties, in the same way that other non-voluntary roles such as parenthood bring with them special rights and duties. Those special responsibilities are defined in terms of institutions and attach to specified roles. When we talk about institutional roles, we imply that the institution has rules that define offices and positions, which can be occupied by different individuals at different times. Hospitals, universities, business firms, and other institutions retain their identity across changes of doctors and patients, teachers and students, and staff. Impersonality, organizational scholars maintain, is the defining characteristic of organizational design (Simon, 1976). Institutions are ongoing, self-reproducing structures, each with a life of its own. Occupational roles and professions arise to provide for certain social needs or interests. In order to fulfill those needs and expectations, they have functions and sets of proper tasks. For example, business firms need a chief financial officer who manages the financial risks of the business, is responsible for financial planning and record-keeping, and financial reporting to higher

management. And the profession of medicine exists because people have an interest in being healthy and a need for medical care.

There is no meaningful notion of the expression ‘sales representative,’ ‘doctor,’ or ‘CFO’ that does not necessarily involve a reference to these positions and the responsibilities associated to these stations. The terms ‘CEO,’ ‘nurse,’ ‘lawyer’ and ‘accountant’ have meaning only as roles only in relation to a social institution which gives the role occupant certain functions and responsibilities.

In addition, roles and professions are at least partially defined by the goals and ends they serve: a comedian aims to entertain; a lawyer aims to provide legal services; a treasurer aims to ensure that the corporation has enough money to carry out its stated aims and objectives. Roles give their occupants special reasons for actions, arguably moral reasons, reasons that are different from personal reasons.⁵

As Chester Barnard puts it in his landmark book:

“For example, a clerk writing on a report form for a corporation is obviously doing something at a place, on a form, and about a subject that clearly never could engage his personal interests... Although persons are agents of the action, the action is not personal; it is collective, its character determined by the requirements of the system.” (Barnard, 1938: 77)

The nature of the actions performed by role occupants is also defined by the role and the corresponding institution. Some actions are the actions that they are because of the corporate context. For instance, I sign my name and, depending on my position, I consign someone to death or I expend corporate funds or I fire someone, etc.

It is generally accepted that role-players are allowed to do things which are normally impermissible from a moral point of view. Physicians are allowed to make

⁵ It is at least possible that an employee may adopt corporate interests as her own, much as Aristotle appears to say that one ought to derive certain personal interests from those of one’s good community. I thank Ed Hartman for raising this point.

patients unconscious, to cut them open and remove some of their internal parts, which would be criminal behavior under normal conditions. Lawyers are required to keep confidential important information that may have important implications for third parties, a conduct that is considered impermissible under the ordinary state of affairs. It is alleged that occupants of these roles and professions may engage in acts of deception, coercion, and even violence that are normally considered to be morally impermissible. Role-players can do so as part of their role, on behalf of the client or firm, out of a moral obligation to follow professional rules, agreements, or orders from superiors. They have, so the argument goes, permission or even obligations to ignore the moral norms that are generally held to be binding on them *qua* persons; they should act on behalf of their client or firm in ways that would be wrong if done on their own behalf.

Role morality is problematic because it raises at least three serious questions of justification in ethics. First, there are questions on the source and nature of role obligations, that is, on the very existence of role obligations and whether legitimate moral obligations can be attached to roles (Hardimon, 1994; Applbaum, 1999; Simmons, 2001). A second question of justification arises as to the scope of special moral obligations, that is, whether we can justify the specific institutional obligations that are attached to a specific role or profession (Luban, 1988; Bowie, 1982; Goldman, 1980). And the third inquiry asks whether and how the constraints of ordinary morality apply to role-players and professionals in their roles. In other words, the third question is concerned with what to do when the duties of various roles come into conflict with other roles and with the demands of ordinary morality and whether ordinary morality supersedes the morality of roles. This chapter is primarily concerned with the third of these questions.

5.3. ROLE OBLIGATIONS AND OBLIGATIONS QUA PERSONS

As described above, role morality is regarded as a source of moral conflict in that the demands of role morality allegedly cut across the demands of ordinary morality. A role applies to an individual in his capacity as an occupant of that role, as a brother, as a citizen, as an engineer, as a CEO, etc. A role obligation is,

“...a moral requirement, which attaches to an institutional role, whose content is fixed by the function of the role, and whose normative force flows from the role.” (Hardimon, 1994: 334)

Consider a famous case in legal ethics, the Garrow case. In July of 1973, Syracuse lawyer Frank Armani was appointed by the court to defend Robert Garrow, a person who had been identified in the stabbing of young Philip Dombrowski. In a conversation with Armani and his colleague Francis Belge, Garrow admitted to killing Dombrowski, along with two other girls (Susan Petz and Alicia Hauck) and one other boy (Daniel Porter). Garrow also told Armani and Belge that he left the dead bodies in an abandoned mine shaft. Armani and Belge discovered both of the girls' dead bodies exactly where Garrow had described they were hidden. When Mr. Petz, the father of Susan Petz, had come to ask the attorneys for help in finding out what happened to his daughter, Armani and Belge should decide whether to tell the victims' families what they had discovered or keep their duty of confidentiality to Garrow. Armani and Belge told the victims' families nothing. After the events became public – because Garrow confessed to the murders – a local prosecutor indicted the attorneys for failing to reveal information about a crime and for failing to see that bodies were properly buried. However, the New York State Bar ruled that the attorneys' confidentiality obligation both permitted and required Armani and Belge to maintain silence because divulging the information would have established the client's guilt and betrayed the attorneys' duty to defend Garrow (Goldfarb, 2009). In

sum, Armani and Belge suffered the alleged conflicts between ordinary morality and obedience to their code. Whereas ordinary decency requires citizens to tell police and Mr. Petz, professional standards actually forbid doing so.

The apparent discontinuity between occupational morality and ordinary morality entails that sometimes role-players are morally permitted (or even required as in the Garrow case) to radically separate their behavior as role occupants from the obligations they have as ordinary persons.⁶

There are at least three different types of moral conflicts related to roles.

First, some conflicts arise between occupational role obligations and other so-called noncontractual role obligations (Hardimon, 1994), such as parental responsibilities, moral responsibilities attached to citizenship, and perhaps, affiliations to other social and religious groups. For instance, work-family balance is a longstanding concern in the literature on human resources management and organizational psychology; employees as well as organizations attempt to balance work demands and family responsibilities and minimize this conflict, because they are both, arguably, morally justifiable (Goodnow, 1994).⁷

Second, role obligations that are associated with corporate roles are said to conflict with professional obligations. Ford engineers may have experienced that sort of dilemma when they reviewed the cost-benefit analysis and crash-test documents related

⁶ It is perhaps worth asking how much difference there is between adopting a role and signing a contract. A contract brings obligations with it, and one may find down the road that these obligations conflict with obligations that one would have if one had not signed the contract. The latter obligations may be so strong that they provide evidence that one should not have signed the contract in the first place and should now abrogate it. As it will be clear later though, the language of duties and obligations may not be the most appropriate to deal with the conflicting demands of roles and social institutions.

⁷ There is of course potential for conflicts among noncontractual role obligations, such as between family obligations and political obligations and between, say, our duties as citizens and our duties as members of the Church. They are beyond the scope of this chapter.

to the dangerous Pinto fuel tanks, which were liable to rupture. Yet, they failed to blow the whistle and make the information public (Werhane, 1999). Dennis Gioia – now a professor of business ethics at Pennsylvania State University – was a recall coordinator at the time the Pintos were tested. After seeing one actual explosion, Gioia brought the Pinto for departmental review as a possible recall. But they decided not to recall the car because the evidence was not conclusive – so they thought – that the Pinto was more defective than its competitors, despite the fact that there were more than forty Japanese and European models in same price and quality range of the Pinto, which were safer than the Pinto (Birsch and Fielder, 1994; Werhane, 1999). And, more importantly, a Ford internal report on the costs and benefits associated to recalling the Pinto indicated that the cost of recalling the Pinto outweighed the benefits of selling the Pinto both at the Ford level and at the community level (Gioia, 1992, Hoffman, 1984).⁸ More recently, Arthur Andersen employees may have experienced a similar conflict. According to documentation on Enron’s downfall, senior partners at Arthur Andersen expressed concerns about Enron’s off-balance-sheet partnerships, called “special purpose entities,” which the company used to hide losses from investors. Arthur Andersen senior partners suggested that Enron create a special committee to oversee these partnership transactions, but David Duncan (senior partner assigned to Enron at the time), who was present at the Arthur Andersen meeting and was involved in the decision regarding the special committee, never communicated this suggestion to Enron’s Board of Directors. Instead, Duncan suggested that Andersen was satisfied with Enron’s internal controls (McLean

⁸ The case of the Pinto is one of the most widely discussed in business ethics. However, the facts of the matter may be in dispute. Apparently, there were even disagreements among the Ford engineers involved in the case. For the view that the Pinto was adequately safe, see De George (1981) and Ford Motor Company (1980).

and Elkind, 2003: 317). Duncan may have experienced a conflict of duties between the moral obligations attached to his role in Arthur Andersen, his professional obligations as an accountant, and his affiliation with Enron, which technically does not involve any special obligation (Warren and Alzola, 2009).

Third, role obligations are frequently said to conflict with the demands of ordinary morality. Indeed, in the realm of the adversary professions, role morality is defined as “a moral permission to harm others in ways that, if not for the role, would be wrong.” (Applbaum, 1999: 3) For instance, a lawyer defending an accused rapist is allowed (or even required) to cross-examine the victim in ways that make her appear promiscuous even if the lawyer knows she is not. An executioner may be allowed to follow orders to execute a possibly innocent man. A general may endanger innocent people to win a battle. A police officer is entitled to infringe on the privacy of a person in the course of a crime investigation. These behaviors would be morally impermissible under a normal state of affairs.⁹

In his critique of bureaucratic organizations, MacIntyre argues:

“in his capacity of corporate executive, the manager not only has no need to take account of, but *must* not take account of certain types of considerations which he might feel obliged to recognize were he acting as parent, as consumer, or as citizen.” (1979: 126)

A central problem of role morality is, then, that role obligations are said to frequently come into conflict with the demands of ordinary morality or “nonrole” morality. The conflict arises when a role-player, bound by the norms of a role, realizes that assessed by criteria of nonrole morality, the performance of what is required by the

⁹ In due course, we will examine the plausibility of these cases, which may be controversial. I am not defending the claim that they are real dilemmas. I am just reporting the sort of examples provided in the literature on role morality. My argument will be that most of these cases do not represent real conflicts between role morality and ordinary morality.

role would be wrong. What should the agent do when role obligations appear to be incompatible with ordinary morality?

The philosophical literature on role morality identifies at least three ways of dealing with these apparent conflicts, as follows:

- (1) there is a presumption in favor of role obligations; they constitute *prima facie* moral obligations;¹⁰
- (2) nonrole morality subsumes role morality; when they are in conflict, role morality never trumps nonrole morality;
- (3) both role obligations and nonrole obligations constitute *prima facie* moral obligations but neither kind always trumps the other.

The origins of position (1) can be traced back to Hegel. A version of it was defended in Francis H. Bradley's famous chapter "My Station and Its Duties" in his *Ethical Studies*. Bradley resolves conflicts between role and nonrole obligations in favor of the former. As he puts it:

"I am myself by sharing with others, by including in my essence relations to them, the relations of the social state. If I wish to realize my true being, I must therefore realize something beyond my being as a mere this or that; for my true being has in it a life which is not the life of any mere particular, and so must be called a universal life. What is it then that I am to realize? We have said it in "my station and its duties". To know what a man is (as we have seen) you must not take him in isolation. He is one of a people, he was born in a family, he lives in a certain society, in a certain state. What he has to do depends on what his place is, what his function is, and that all comes from his station in the organism." (1927: 173)

¹⁰ W. D. Ross' (1988) notion of "prima facie duties" has been influential for thinking of moral conflicts. "Prima facie" obligations are interpreted in contrast to "all things considered" obligations. I have a prima facie duty to do something just in case there is some reason to think that it is my duty to do it. A fuller consideration of the act's features might rebut this conclusion by showing that the features providing reason to ascribe a prima facie obligation are overridden by other features of the act. A prima facie duty is overridden when a prima facie duty fails to state an all-things-considered duty because another prima facie duty that conflicts with it does so.

Philip Pettit (1986) explicitly uses the notion of *prima facie* duties in defense of Bradley's thesis. Similarly, Walzer (1973) and Nagel (1979) suggest that role morality sometimes trumps ordinary morality. Walzer argues that wrongdoing by public officials is inevitable because situations arise where no matter what the political leader does, he will do something wrong. Nagel defends the claim that impersonal aspects are more prominent in the assessment of institutions than in the assessment of individual actions. Public morality warrants methods that are not permitted for private individuals. In his words:

“The design of institutions may include roles whose occupants must determine what to do by principles different from those that govern private individuals.” (1979: 82)

Along these lines, it has been alleged that Winston Churchill knew the German plan to bomb Coventry, England in November of 1940 because British intelligence had broken German codes. Churchill apparently let the bombing take place without evacuating the city because if he had ordered the city cleared out, the Germans would have known the code had been broken and would quickly have invented a new code. Churchill's decision, which naturally resulted in wide scale death, helped the allies catch the Germans by surprise later and beat the Germans in the war, eventually saving millions of lives.

Consequentialists will endorse option (1) if the presumption in favor of role obligations by individuals holding the roles leads to overall positive consequences. According to that view, there are no decisive objections against role-related deception, coercion, or violence if the institutions and roles that permit or even require inflicting harm are successful in delivering goods that outweigh their negative effects.

Alternatively, consequentialism may reject option (1). For if one's client's well-being is no more intrinsically valuable than the well-being of any other person, then one ought to be impartial when choosing between promoting the good of one's client and promoting the good of a stranger. Indeed, consequentialists may say that the mere fact that one has taken an oath or signed a contract to benefit a client or a business firm does not in itself imply that one has any role obligation to benefit that person or corporation because one's client's good does not carry greater weight than does the good of any other person. Due to these counterintuitive conclusions, at least some versions of consequentialism strike many as unacceptable accounts of role morality.

Conversely, most versions of Kantianism and contractualism will probably reject option (1) and favor a version of option (2). Admittedly, deontological ethics can justify special obligations attached to roles on the basis of the special relations between employees and business firms and between professionals and clients. Promises, contracts, and agreements are important considerations in deciding the actual obligations one has. Hence, Kantians may accept that roles are relevant factors in establishing what we ought or ought not to do.

However, the Kantian conception of rational moral agency is an expression of our nature as free and equal rational persons. A self is different from its roles. Kantian theory relies on the notion of a *noumenal* self that is necessarily free of the constraints of a freely accepted role and all the rights, privileges, and obligations thereunto appertaining. Insofar as we are identified with our institutional roles or titles, we are neither equal nor free. Hence, our actual selves are devoid of any role or position. According to both formulations of the Kantian principle, as moral selves, we are truly, unconditionally,

persons. It follows then, that nonrole obligations should win out in cases where they conflict with role-based duties.¹¹

Option (3) may appear more reasonable than the alternatives. Being both - role obligations and nonrole obligations – *prima facie* obligations, the presumption in each case is defeasible. Neither kind always trumps the other; so that we cannot say in advance that one sort of obligations will always trump the other. However, attractive as it might be, it is surely not attractive under a principle-based theory of morality... the paradox of a principle-based ethics that does not provide action-guiding standards.

Even if we can find partial support for any of these options, I shall argue that options (1), (2), and (3) are equally problematic.

First, option (2) does not take roles and institutions seriously enough. Either roles do not impose genuine moral obligations, or they are diluted to a point where the distinctive institutional goals they serve are construed merely in terms of universal goodness. Consequently, we know a priori how the alleged conflicts between role obligations and obligations *qua* persons should be resolved; nonrole obligations will be always triumphant. Yet, as mentioned before, a relevant dimension of our lives is lived through social institutions; there is also a need for social regularity and greater efficiency. And there are certain significant human goods and social ends which can only be achieved through social institutions, professions, and bureaucratic organizations, whose justification is precisely the pursuit of those social ends. That is what makes institutional roles socially desirable, which in turn makes certain behavior morally permissible

¹¹ This is so even if we accept that both formulations of the Kantian principle are to be applied in culture-bound ways rather than in abstract; treating persons with respect and not merely as a means is most of the time culturally defined, that is, defined by the modes of interaction that are customary in different roles and institutions. Hence, what counts as respect for persons when dealing with subordinates may be different from what counts as respect for persons when dealing with my children.

because it is necessary to the structure of the institution even when it would be generally considered morally impermissible.

Second, option (1) must deal with the limitations of moral conventionalism, namely, that the justificatory capacity of institutional morality is limited. Tony Soprano is right; he occupies a role, which entails certain role obligations as the acting Boss of the DiMeo Crime Family. He says, “We're in a situation where everybody involved knows the stakes. And if you're gonna accept those stakes... You gotta do certain things.” Nevertheless, it cannot be said that he acts rightly when he orders the death of others and kills with his bare hands in fulfilling his role obligations. He needs more than the Mafia code of honor to justify the existence of a *moral* obligation. One’s duty to perform a certain action – insofar as it is a *moral* duty – cannot be merely explained with reference to the fact that the conduct in question is required of a role agent.

One may reply that Tony Soprano’s case – like the case of the Nazi soldier who honors the oath he has taken by following his superior’s order to kill innocent Jews – is not the most appropriate example of legitimate role obligations, given the plain immorality of his job. Many of the examples of role and professional obligations provided above are said to offer valid institutional excuses.¹² While a person would be guilty of a moral offense if she lies to you, a business executive negotiating a contract is entitled – or even required – to bluff his colleagues, so the argument goes (Carr, 1968;

¹² Legal philosophers distinguish justifications from excuses. One justifies an action by showing that although ordinarily it would be wrong, in the case at hand it is not because the wrongness is merely illusory. By contrast, one excuses an action when the wrongness remains but the agent’s responsibility is diminished or removed. Defenses are then classified in legal philosophy as either excuses or justifications. Insanity is an excuse; self-defense is a justification. The rationale is that it is important to distinguish sharply between appraisals of acts and appraisals of agents, such that if the facts that comprise the defense describe the defendant’s act, they call for a justification but if the facts describe the defendant himself, they constitute an excuse (Husak, 2005). In this chapter, I am concerned with deviations from ordinary morality that either are justified or excused by role-governed behavior. The mainstream approaches to moral philosophy that I discuss in this section would arguably consider roles as excuses.

Carson, 1993). While it is impermissible to kill someone who does not pose any legitimate threat to the agent, an executioner who is ordered to administer a lethal injection is not morally liable for his behavior. The structure of the institutional excuses is that it is part of role players' job to bluff and to kill people. Assuming that the roles of business executive and executioner are morally desirable, then the moral responsibility for their role-governed behavior falls on the role and the institution rather than on the agent performing such behavior.¹³

The difference, then, between Tony Soprano and the executioner may be understood by considering that role obligations cannot provide institutional excuses unless the institution itself is justified. It is not enough for Tony Soprano to say that "certain things" that wrong other human beings are required by his role obligations. The role act that would be normally impermissible must be justified by the positive moral good of the institution. Following Luban, the structure of institutional excuses can be spelled out this way:

"...the agent (1) justifies the institution by demonstrating its moral goodness; (2) justifies the role by appealing to the structure of the institution; (3) justifies the role obligations by showing that they are essential to the role; and (4) justifies the role act by showing that the obligations require it." (1998: 131)

Whereas Luban's argument shows that role obligations can provide institutional excuses if the institution serves a moral good, it brings us back to the problem previously discussed regarding option (2), namely, that it cannot take roles and institutions seriously enough as sources of moral obligations. For the justificatory work seems to be done here

¹³ Interestingly, one of the questions raised by the 'teachers' of the Milgram experiments described in chapter four, when they were administering 180 volts and the 'learner' was shouting and pretending that he could not stand the pain was: "who is going to take responsibility if anything happens to that gentleman?" The experimenter invariably responded: "I will." This is not say, of course, that the situation provided them with excusing conditions.

by the sanction of a higher morality that supersedes role morality and that can defend the institution by showing its moral goodness. In addition, it is contentious that once the institution or profession is justified, the injunctions of role morality trump ordinary morality. I shall address this crucial issue in section five.

5.4. THREE WAYS OUT OF THE PROBLEM OF ROLE MORALITY

There is an alternative way to deal with the central problem of role morality, namely, to deny the conflict between role obligations and obligations *qua persons*. This solution provides an easy way out of the role quandary and the paradoxes of the three alternatives mentioned above. One can articulate the argument that there are no genuine moral conflicts between role and nonrole morality in one of three following ways:

- (a) there are no genuine moral conflicts between the demands of roles and institutions and the demands of nonrole morality because only one of the alleged demands is a genuine *moral* demand;
- (b) there are no genuine moral conflicts between role morality and nonrole morality because roles and institutional positions are amoral;
- (c) there are no genuine moral conflicts between role morality and nonrole morality because roles are an essential part of what it means to be a good person, and role virtues are not intrinsically in conflict with the character traits of a good person.

The first strategy – which can be traced back as far as Plato – holds that role differentiation does not entail ethical differentiation in the sense of institutional excuses. Hence, the criteria of right action do not vary with one's occupational roles. There is one single notion of justice, a universal concept, which may be instantiated in different ways

in different activities, for example, in the role of the COO or the role of the physician. But, according to this view, there are no real conflicts because the demands of roles must be consistent with general principles and values in order to be legitimate demands. For instance, we must reject the claim that a role player or a professional has a moral duty to keep client confidentiality when doing so will result in substantial harm to innocent third parties.

Consider the case of Teresa Hausler. On June 27, 1991, her ex-boyfriend, Gad Joseph, telephoned his mental health counselor to tell him that he was going to kill Teresa. The counselor asked him come in for therapy, which ended at noon, with Gad's promise that he would not hurt Teresa. When fifteen minutes later Teresa telephoned the counselor to tell him that she was going to Gad's apartment to pick up her clothing, the counselor advised her not to go to the apartment but failed to mention his conversation with Gad. Teresa ignored the advice and continued onto Gad's apartment, where Gad fatally shot her six times in the head and abdomen. At the time of the lawsuit filed by Teresa's family against the mental health counselor and the Albert Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia, the law in Pennsylvania was still unclear regarding what duty a medical professional owed to a third party.¹⁴ Still, according to (a), the results of the counselor's action is unjust and his role as a mental counselor does not make any difference to the moral evaluation of his conduct.

The second strategy – which has been popularized in business ethics by Carr and Carson among others – suggests that institutions create a special context with a special morality of its own. Carr (1968) analogizes business to a poker game, such that certain practices that would be ordinarily impermissible, like bluffing, are merely game strategy,

¹⁴ Emerich v. Philadelphia Center for Human Development, 720 A.2d 1032 (Pa. 1998).

like bluffing in poker. In the same vein, just war theorists analogize war to a boxing match. While people ordinarily have a right not to be attacked by others, by entering the ring, a boxer waives this right and gains in return a right to attack his rival. Similarly, so the argument goes, the legal rules that govern the combat in war free soldiers from making sure that they fight with just cause. By wearing uniforms, soldiers accept these rules; they give up their rights not to be attacked by soldiers in other armies. Tony Soprano's defense of his role obligations goes along the lines of this second version of the argument for role ethical differentiation.

According to this second view, the ethics of business – as well as the morality of war and the morality of the Mafia – is game ethics, that is, the standards of right and wrong of the game of business differ from the prevailing traditions of morality in our society. Carr (1970) argues that a person in her office life ceases to be a moral person; she is a player, she is guided by a different set of standards. She cannot afford to indulge in ethical sentiments that might cost her seat in the table. Similarly, Carson (1993) suggests that it is permissible to misstate one's bargaining position when one has good reason to think that one's negotiating partner is doing the same. He says that in ordinary negotiations each party consents to renouncing the ordinary warranty of truth. Business negotiations are ritualized activities in which it is not expected that one will speak truthfully about one's negotiating position.

Following this argument, there is no clash between role morality and nonrole morality. Surely the game model of roles and professions can easily be used to justify – and even require – a host of morally questionable business practices and behavior but they would not be subject to any ethical evaluation because roles and institutions are in

essence amoral rather than sources of justifications or excuses, according to the second approach.

Both options, (a) and (b), are equally unpersuasive. By establishing that genuine moral demands are universal by definition, option (a) fails to take roles seriously. By stating that roles and institutions create special obligations and permissions that are amoral, option (b) takes role morality too seriously.

In the remainder of this chapter, I shall argue for the third strategy, option (c), which presents the role problem in terms of complementary conceptions of goodness and different levels of specification of the virtues.

5.5. GOODNESS, ROLES, AND VIRTUES

Virtue ethics is particularly well-suited for reconciling the demands of roles and institutions together with the demands of ordinary morality. This is particularly so in the realm of corporate roles and professional ethics. Indeed, there are no such discontinuities between role and nonrole ethics; the concept of goodness is unequivocal.

Recall that the notion of goodness has been the object of profound discussions in philosophy and applied ethics. As Aristotle observed, ‘good’ is used of many different things that are in different categories. ‘Good’ is intimately connected with the substantive it qualifies, so the meaning of the phrase ‘a good X’ is determined – partially – by what fills the place of X. For the Greeks, a good X is an X that adequately performs its function. For instance, a good violin is one that has the appropriate resonance properties that make it sound good. And a good dairy cow has the characteristics that enable it to produce, say, more than X gallons of milk a day. Although we do not mean the same

when we apply the word to different things – for example, what makes a good nurse is different from what makes a good CEO – the word is not ambiguous.

There are two important features of the account of goodness defended here.

First, goodness involves descriptions of human beings that refer to their roles or jobs or skilled activities and that highlight what aspects of a human activity have more weight in the evaluation. For a professional opera singer, his performance as a singer and the assessments of that performance by other colleagues and the experts matter. When tenor Roberto Alagna left the stage at Teatro Alla Scala last year in response to the audience booing him after “Celeste Aida,” his opening aria as Radames, he surely failed.¹⁵ In contrast, when I crack a note while singing in the shower, I have reasons not to care much about it; after all, I am merely an ethics professor who loves opera and enjoys singing in the shower.

Second, saying that something or someone is ‘a good X’ entails not only a purely descriptive claim but a prescriptive statement as well (Williams, 1972), as explained in chapter one. Being a basketball center – or 7ft 6in tall – and being *a good* basketball center are two completely different sets of statements. Yao Ming is a center and he is 7ft 6in tall. That can be simply measured because it is plain fact about Yao Ming. But whether he is a good pivot involves also normative components; not only technical skills and good movements but also being a good team player and possessing a number of mental skills from confidence and concentration to the ability to rise to the occasion. So

¹⁵ The facts of this case are controversial as well. One may say – especially Alagna’s fans, including Angela Gheorghiu – that Alagna did not really fail. He maintains that he walked off in disgust because the demanding Scala audience was being unreasonable (and he may be right; after all, they even booed Callas and Pavarotti!). Or maybe he failed because of the audience. In any event, the point I am trying to make is not that the audience was right but merely that the experts’ opinion matter more for Alagna than for myself when it comes to cracking a note. Of course I am still annoyed with myself when I hit a wrong note (anyone should be). But I am more justified in caring about my peers’ opinion on my research than the opinion of the Scala audience on my singing skills.

an understanding of the expression ‘a good X’ where X refers to an institutional role is involved in understanding what is to be an X at all. Those institutional roles entail virtues and responsibilities. For there is no notion of ‘lawyer,’ ‘CEO,’ and ‘office clerk’ that can be explained without reference to the corresponding social institutions and the standards of goodness attached to those positions.

The problem of goodness in occupational roles is centrally relevant for a character-based moral theory. Jobs and professions are among what Bernard Williams calls the ground projects, which are essential for character, integrity, and human flourishing. Our roles are part of the sort of persons we are. We play several roles; we wear always more than one hat and the contention is that some of those roles lead to conflicting moral demands. Hence, with Fried, one may wonder whether the virtues of a good professional or a good role player can be the virtues of a person who is good *qua* human being.

Different versions of virtue ethics provide different answers to the question of what determines the goodness of a role.

In the standard Aristotelian account (Nussbaum, 1988; Hursthouse, 1999), the goodness of roles is determined by reference to the place of such roles in the life of a virtuous person, and so there is no conflict between role virtues and the virtues that make one good *qua* person. According to the Aristotelian approach, for someone to be good as a human being it is necessary that he flourishes.¹⁶

¹⁶ Our flourishing depends upon social roles. It seems quite unlikely that a person makes much progress in life without learning to be good at a number of social and institutional roles. As Aristotle said, we are social animals and, arguably, even more dependent on collaboration than ancient civilizations, given the structure of our economies and the sophisticated division of labor. Humans can barely live without social roles. They cannot create their social roles by themselves. And the social roles they can occupy depend largely on the culture, institutions, and common projects of the people among whom they live. What possibilities of virtue are attainable for people depends essentially on what sort of roles are available in their communities. For

In contrast, non-eudaimonistic versions of virtue ethics (Slote, 2001; Swanson, 2003) may allow for such conflicts between role virtues and ordinary virtues. Non-eudaimonists hold that insofar as the roles are worthwhile, role virtues make the role-player good *qua* professional or role-player, even if role virtues do not make any contribution to goodness *qua* human being. According to this version, for a character trait to be a virtue it is not necessary that it contributes to personal flourishing.¹⁷

Consider for example, Williams' discussion of a fictionalized version of Gauguin, a widely discussed case on the fragmentation of value. Gauguin left his family and friends to go to Tahiti and paint, producing the works so many of us admire. The story shows how an artist "turns away from definite and pressing human claims on him in order to live a life in which, as he supposes, he can pursue his art." (Williams, 1981: 22) He cared about his moral obligation to his family and was deeply in pain – so the story goes. Indeed, he was full of remorse over the economic destitution he was causing his family and his betrayal. Yet, the force of these feelings was overcome by his passionate devotion to painting. He was unwilling to make the sacrifice of his art that would be involved in staying with his family. Williams, Slote, and other virtue ethicists have argued that how Gauguin's actions are judged depends to some extent on the virtues associated with his role as an artist. Gauguin's desertion of his family was morally

instance, one may argue that the role virtues associated with being a good citizen of a democratic state cannot be fully attained except in the context of a democratic society. The dependence of virtue on social context and social support for their development, retention, and behavioral manifestation are important considerations with reference to the requirement of psychological realism that was discussed in chapter one.

¹⁷ Yet, Aristotelian scholars could say that acting in a way that benefits one's family or friends or community – which covers a lot of ground, especially if we admit indirect benefits – contributes to one's own flourishing.

wrong. But “single-minded devotion to aesthetic goals or ideals” is admirable and “a virtue in an artist.” (Slote, 1983: 83)¹⁸

In the end, both versions of virtue ethics will defend the claim that possessing good character traits are necessary for being good *qua* human being but they will differ in how they define being good *qua* human being.¹⁹

Both alternatives need to say something about the function of the institutions in which the roles are embedded as we saw while justifying role obligations in the previous section. For instance, an Aristotelian account of roles would hold that a person of good character requires a good community, which not only supports virtue but in some respects defines which character traits are worth. A virtue is, to a first approximation, a trait that a good community needs in its members. And so a virtue is a eudaimonia-producing factor from the point of view of the person, because the person is a social creature. A good society, then, will have institutions of a certain description such as government agencies, businesses, voluntary associations, professions, etc. They will have to be good of their kind. Thus, they will have roles that are good, that is, roles that a virtuous person can learn how to play well.

¹⁸ Yet, “artistic single-mindedness” is inconceivable apart from a tendency to wrongdoing, Slote says, and so it is morally objectionable and the reason why this is a case of “admirable immorality.” (1983: 92). There is a rich discussion on admirable immorality in the literature to which I cannot do justice here. See Slote (1983), Flanagan (1986), Baron (1986), Stocker (1987), and Adams (2002)

¹⁹ Another version of a virtue ethical account of roles is provided by MacIntyre, whose concept of virtue relies on the notion of human practices and “internal goods,” that is, those goods that are constitutive of the practice. If roles and professions are a kind of “practice,” then it follows that there are standards of excellences that are definitive of a profession. And a virtue is “an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.” (MacIntyre, 1981: 191) In conceptualizing virtue as role-relative, this version of virtue ethics is open to the objection of relativism that was noted above. In contrast, the virtue ethical account of roles that I defend here is consistent with the existence of “universal” virtues. Another problem with the MacIntyrean account is that he condemns business as an essentially immoral activity while my claim here is that corporate role virtues are indeed consistent with ordinary virtues, for reasons that will be clear later.

The point or function of professions and institutions determines the nature and justification of a role and, in turn, the nature of a role determines the standards of good character traits and good behavior associated with that role. Otherwise, Tony Soprano would be right in arguing that the specifications of the role virtues of loyalty, respect, and honor by the code of the North Jersey Mafia are the right ones. The problem arises when the purpose of some professions and social institutions seems to lack any ethical dimension – as Albert Carr argues about the world of business – but role occupants are supposed to serve those purposes and still perform those roles in a proper way, which brings us back to the problem of whether it is possible to be both good *qua* human being and good *qua* role player. Consequently, the interesting question for a virtue ethical account of roles is how the virtues are specified and whether role virtues and ordinary virtues coexist and work together.²⁰

Role virtues are character traits the possession of which is the basis of being ‘a good X’, where X refers to a position and a role occupant. How do they interact with the virtues one possesses *qua* good human being? Role virtues are not derived from ordinary virtues. Role virtues and ordinary virtues are specified at a different level of generality. There is a characteristic way of choosing, feeling, desiring, and reacting well – and of

²⁰ Of course, if Carr is right and the sole end at which business firms aim is to enhance shareholder value as much as possible, then it follows that the set of role virtues that makes for a good businessperson are probably inconsistent with the character traits one must develop as good *qua* human being. Solomon (1992) and Hartman (1996) have successfully addressed this concern by showing that business is an essential part of the good life and that business is an essentially communal activity that makes the good life possible for everyone in a community. Furthermore, Friedman himself – the champion of the view that the only responsibility of business is to increase shareholder value – concedes that the obligation to maximize shareholder value is not incompatible with the manager being a good person. He says that the manager should not act against ordinary morality. Hence, at least in principle there is no radical discontinuity between the character traits that lead to flourishing and those that lead to success in corporate life. I shall get back to this point in the next section, when replying to objections to my proposal.

choosing, feeling, desiring and reacting defectively – in each sphere of human experience, what can be called the *domain* of a virtue.²¹

The “thin” or “nominal” account of a virtue comprises those character traits, desires, values, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that are appropriate *in a certain sphere or terrain*. Various competing specifications of the virtues will vary with the sphere of the grounding experience, that is, with the nature, point, and function of institutional and social roles. In the “thin” account, a role virtue is delineated by reference to its domain and target and by appeal to the purpose of the role and the goal of the institution/profession in which the role is embedded.

Furthermore, there is a “thick” or “full” definition of the virtue which refers to a sort of universal domain of the virtue, that is, a sphere of universal experience and choice that is not fixed by roles or professional positions.²² The “thick” account of a virtue gives a vague specification of the character traits, desires, values, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that are necessary to flourish or live well. Relevant aspects of the social situation of the agent, her roles, and her relations to other agents are removed from this specification.

The thick account is then shaped by a number of practicalities and social features of the agent – including role considerations – that give content and specify the character traits that are necessary for being good in the dimension of the agent’s life that is lived through social institutions. In turn, role virtues are constrained by ordinary virtues and the general requirements of being good *qua* human being that prevent the unrestricted pursuit

²¹ To same extent, Aristotle can be interpreted along these lines. “Clearly, then, moral virtue belongs to all of them; but the temperance of a man and of a woman, or the courage and justice of a man and of a woman, are not, as Socrates maintained, the same.” (*Politics*, 1260a9-10)

²² Here I am borrowing upon the distinction between the “thin” and “thick” understanding of virtues defended by Nussbaum (1988).

of professional and institutional goals. Therefore, the possession and exercise of role virtues are not inconsistent – at least in principle – with the possession and exercise of ordinary virtues.²³

Therefore, in response to the starting question of this paragraph, I propose that role virtues and ordinary virtues will interact in a way such that:

- (i) ordinary virtues are shaped by role considerations,
- (ii) role virtues are constrained by ordinary virtues,
- (iii) some special role virtues may not be the specification of a broader ordinary virtue, and
- (iv) some ordinary virtues may not be necessary in some professional and institutional contexts.

To illustrate (i), think of how the ordinary virtue of honesty is shaped by role features in the business world. For example, the virtue of honesty in business negotiations will probably allow for behavior that would not be morally permissible according to the ordinary specification of the virtue, for example bluffing and some concealment of facts. As Hartman puts it, “it may sometimes be wrong to do what would be right in a world in which there are no irrational people and no free riders.” (1996: 92)

Regarding (ii), one may think of the role virtue of loyalty, which at the corporate level often includes the expectation that an employee will not jeopardize the interests of the firm by revealing confidential information to outside parties. The role virtue of

²³ One might argue that at every moment every person is playing some role or other (Velleman, 2009), and that any virtue, say, courage, may look different if we examine a courageous soldier, a courageous scholar, and a courageous mother, though they are all courageous. A courageous person would then be someone who shows courage in every role he or she plays. But one might go on to say that there is no such thing as being purely courageous – courageous at nothing – just as there is no such thing as the Platonic form of courage. I still prefer the distinction between a thick and thin sense of courage. I thank Ed Hartman for raising this point.

loyalty is constrained by the general requirements of ordinary loyalty in cases in which the information to be revealed is evidence of corporate misconduct and it is released as a sort of moral protest. As an ordinary virtue, loyalty may require emotional, motivational, and behavioral responses that insofar as they do jeopardize the interests of the firm, could be seen as a behavioral manifestation of a role vice – namely, disloyalty – rather than a virtue, such as blowing the whistle, but they are not, as it will be explained in the next section of this chapter.

Another example of how an ordinary virtue has constrained in reality the role virtue of loyalty is Hugh Thompson, Jr.'s behavior at the My Lai Massacre. Thompson was a U.S. Army helicopter pilot serving in the Vietnam War. Early in the morning of March 16, 1968, Thompson came upon U.S. ground troops killing Vietnamese civilians in and around the village of My Lai. Thompson and two members of his crew landed the helicopter in the line of fire between American troops and fleeing Vietnamese civilians and pointed their own guns at the U.S. soldiers to prevent more killings. Thompson later coaxed civilians out of a bunker so they could be evacuated, and then landed his helicopter again to pick up a wounded child they transported to a hospital. His efforts led to the cease-fire order at My Lai. The initial quote of this chapter recreates the quarrel between Thompson and Second Lieutenant William Calley, who was found guilty of ordering the My Lai Massacre (Angers, 1999). Yet, at the time, Thompson was sharply criticized by Congressmen, in particular Chairman Mendel Rivers, for his disloyalty. Rivers publicly stated that Thompson was the only soldier at My Lai who should be punished for turning his weapons to fellow American troops. He attempted to have Thompson court-martialed, but he was not successful. When Thompson's actions became

publicly known, he started receiving hate mail, death threats, and mutilated animals on his doorstep. It was only many years later that he was nearly universally regarded as a hero.²⁴

Cases included under (iii) and (iv) are more controversial. A special role virtue in the business world that is not regarded as an ordinary virtue is the virtue of toughness. Solomon describes toughness as a virtue, indeed as “the most misunderstood virtue in business life” (1992: 335), which is central in negotiating and is a legitimate part of a legitimate business or professional activity – as opposed to the ruthlessness of Tony Soprano. One might find some ordinary virtue of which toughness is a shaped version.²⁵ And it can also be said that there are certain virtues that apply less widely than the cardinal virtues. But a soldier, a scholar, and a mother must all be tough in their respective ways.²⁶

Finally, under (iv) one might include those ordinary virtues that are not necessary in some spheres of experience, such as the ordinary virtue of friendship in the legal profession (Oakley and Cocking, 2001) or the ordinary virtue of generosity – under a narrow characterization, as the giving of possessions – in those societies that eliminate private ownership (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1263b11).

Again, cases under (iii) and (iv) might be problematic because they entail discontinuities between goodness in role-playing and goodness *qua* person. Still, a few discontinuities may not be enough to worry us. A good institution may need some very

²⁴ *Moral Courage In Combat: The My Lai Story*, USNA Lecture, 2003. Retrieved from http://www.usna.edu/Ethics/Publications/ThompsonPg1-28_Final.pdf

²⁵ Ed Hartman suggests that toughness may be an interesting combination of honesty and courage (personal communication).

²⁶ Shklar (1984) goes further to argue that certain ordinary vices like hypocrisy and dishonesty can be helpful for politicians to protect citizens' rights and national interests. One could extend such an argument to the realm of business. On the discussion of “admirable immorality,” see note 16.

specifically defined virtues that are less important elsewhere, and may not require certain virtues.²⁷ The problem would be if a good institution requires vices, but I have been arguing that it is not the case. I shall get back to this problem in the next section.

In any event, what I am trying to demonstrate is that role virtues are an essential part of what it means to be good *qua* human being. Virtues are indeed best understood contextually; they are embedded in our social institutions and professions (Annas, 2002). Role virtues are not merely an addition to a comprehensive account of goodness. And role virtues are not incompatible with ordinary virtues; they are not characteristically in conflict with each other, at least not in the way that role obligations and obligations *qua* human beings apparently are in the action-based moral tradition.

In sum, standards of goodness vary according to the nature, point, and function of roles; virtues are role differentiated; goodness varies across roles. The virtues associated with the performance of institutional roles are called role virtues; but they are nonetheless virtues. Ordinary virtues are shaped by role considerations and role virtues are restricted by the general requirements of goodness *qua* human being. Hence, business practices and conventions such as concealment and bluffing might be regarded as non-vicious practices in business if one has good reasons to think that one's negotiating partner is doing the same, insofar as business negotiations are customary activities in which it is not expected that role players speak truthfully about their negotiating position. Likewise, the virtue of compassion has a different content in accounting and babysitting. And the virtue of

²⁷ Aristotelian virtue ethics holds that *phronesis* is a necessary and sufficient condition of all the virtues. Presumably it can appear in the guise of courage or that of generosity. If so, it would be natural to suppose that there are a number of virtues that appear in slightly different guises and some that appear in fewer. And we can find a way to connect a role virtue with a broader virtue. Consider the virtue of being a skilled proofreader. That contributes to clarity, forcefulness, and style in writing, hence to communication, hence to spreading knowledge, hence to the good life. I thank Ed Hartman for raising this point.

justice has a different scope for a lawyer in an adversarial role, defending her client's legal right, and the lawyer *qua* human being, as member of a community and as our neighbor.

The other question here is whether we are ever not playing a role. Space here precludes a detailed examination of the question (but see Velleman, 2009). It will suffice to note that if the answer to that question is no – if at every moment I am a professor or a father or a subway passenger or a Met subscriber – then there is nothing especially problematic about being a businessperson. Understanding all of the uses of the term 'virtuous' requires seeing how each instance of virtue relates directly or indirectly to the good life or – or, under a non-eudaimonistic theory – to the good community. So attributing a virtue to any person in any context requires that we show a connection between that trait in that context and the good of the community, and thus, to the good life.

5.6. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES: DIRTY HANDS AND BAD HABITUATION

This proposal may encounter a number of objections. In the following paragraphs, I shall present two of the most serious and sketch the lines along which a virtue ethical account of roles might proceed in formulating a reply.

The first objection – let us call it the “dirty hands” objection – concerns the relationship between role virtues and ordinary virtues. I have argued that in my account, there is no fundamental conflict between them and hence, the issue of role morality is less problematic than it appears. Yet, someone may contend that the four conditions delineated in the previous section reveal that ultimately the agent who occupies a role may have to deal with situations from which it is impossible to emerge with clean hands.

Especially in cases like (iii), where some special role virtues are not part of the list of character traits one must possess *qua* good human being, and (iv) where some ordinary virtues are not regarded as necessary in some professional and corporate contexts, it seems that a role player may be forced to act like a scoundrel.

Some scholars argue that in pursuing important public goals public officials may legitimately use means that would otherwise be wrong (Walzer, 1973; Williams, 1981). Business executives also face the decision to indulge in “dirty hands” whenever they are forced to choose between upholding important values and avoiding some impending moral disaster. A decent person who enters political or corporate life, so the objection goes, is required to learn the lesson Machiavelli first set out to teach on “how not to be good,” that is, she must unlearn certain ordinary virtues in order to win the struggle.

Even an agent of good character, one who possesses the ordinary character traits of, say, justice, compassion, and honesty, is allegedly forced to act unjustly, callously, and dishonestly *qua* role player in those tragic situations. Those situations in which it is necessary to do something wrong in order to attain what is good or right may call for the – contentious – role virtue of ruthlessness (Nagel, 1979; Williams, 1981) which seems to conflict with the ordinary virtues of compassion, benevolence, and integrity among others. These are not just hypothetical cases, as proven by Winston Churchill’s decision to sacrifice Coventry and allow that it was firebombed by the Germans to avoid alerting them that the Enigma code had been cracked. Likewise, in response to the current economic crisis, business executives may need to lay off competent and hard-working loyal employees for the sake of the firm’s survival. Politicians and business executives face such dilemmas all the time. Indeed, those dilemmas make the issue of role morality

an intriguing philosophical problem. And, the objector concludes, these conflicts between ordinary and role virtues are as pervasive as they are in the realm of role obligations and cannot be satisfactorily answered by the thick and thin specification of the virtues.

The second objection – let us call it the bad habituation objection – follows from the first and is about the nature of role virtues in relation to goodness *qua* human being. It takes into account the effects of roles as the coarsening of the character of those who nearly always go by the professional playbook. Roles are particularly problematic for a theory primarily concerned with the cultivation of strong and robust character traits. Virtue is, among other things, a matter of habituation and practice, as explained in chapter two. One acquires the trait of, say, courage, by gradual habituation to overcome one's fears, in the same way one acquires the habit of leaving tips by leaving tips for waiters one will never see again.

According to this view, virtues are habits of right action and vices are habits of excessive or deficient action. MacIntyre's theory, which relies on the idea of social functions and the attachment of a range of actions entailed by each function, conceptualizes virtue along these lines: once the agent internalizes the role's demands, she does it without reflecting, like the hockey player who receives a pass in the closing seconds of a game (MacIntyre, 1981).

In a similar vein, the business executive and the political leader who has learned "how not to be good" have acquired the character traits that are necessary to perform well *qua* role player, for instance, the habit of acting unjustly, callously, and dishonestly when conducting business negotiations or dealing with foreign terrorist leaders respectively. As

Williams puts it, “a certain level of roughness is to be expected by anyone who understands the nature of the activity.” (1981: 61)

It follows, the objector concludes, that if role virtues are relatively stable character traits that are necessary for being good *qua* role player, and those traits are occasionally at odds with the possession of ordinary virtues, then the agent cannot switch – even if occasionally – from being honest, caring, compassionate, and loyal *qua* human being to being dishonest, callous, merciless, and disloyal while serving the distinctive purpose of a social institution (or profession). The objector might argue that a person of good character would end up losing self-respect and even becoming emotionally disturbed if she is required to engage in the practices and behavior entailed by the aforementioned role virtues in business and politics. In sum, the objector concludes, the possession of good character traits *qua* human being does not matter at all in order to succeed *qua* role player and, more importantly, normal human beings cannot possibly develop a virtuous character when they are forced to engage in practices and habits that undermine the cultivation, the possession, and the exercise of ordinary virtues. The second objection is a challenge (again) from psychological realism.

Both objections are serious, and each merits a chapter on its own. In the remaining part of this section, I shall briefly sketch a two-fold reply and indicate the direction of a more comprehensive response. Roughly, I submit that the main problem with the two objections just presented is that both rely on a mistaken conception of ordinary virtues and role virtues, namely, the notion that virtues are just behavioral

dispositions to act in accordance with moral rules or principles, as developed in chapter two.²⁸

First, the “dirty hands” objection is an intricate threat for a virtue ethical account of roles. For even if we find a way to get rid of some inconsistencies between role virtues and ordinary virtues, there may be situations in which it is wrong to do what is actually right, as the objector claims. That is, there might be situations in which role virtues are radically inconsistent with ordinary virtues, in which the demands of roles and professions trump ordinary virtues. Virtue ethicists prescribe that one should do what a person of good character would do under the circumstances. But even a virtuous agent would be prevented from acting from virtue and exercising the good character traits she possesses because she is “forced” to act indecently and ruthlessly.

Hence, if even the person of good character would act like a rogue when acting in that role, it does not make much sense to talk about the possession of certain ordinary virtues or to make a distinction between good and vicious character traits. At the end, insofar as the agent possesses the role virtues that are required for her function, she does not need any other “ordinary” character traits to flourish as role occupant. And even a vicious person, one who lacks virtuous character traits, may behave like the person of good character in such situations; they will both emerge with dirty hands, according to this objection.

But the objection does not hold. For it overlooks the distinction between virtue and virtuous behavior that was introduced in chapter one. As I have anticipated, the dirty hands objection relies on a mischaracterization of role virtues. A role virtue might be

²⁸ Endorsing my thesis, Aristotle observes that “...those who say generally that virtue consists in a good disposition of the soul, or in doing rightly, or the like, only deceive themselves.” (*Politics*, 1260a10)

conducive to more than one action or set of actions and a particular behavior – such as bluffing tactics while negotiating with the union – may be the expression of different states of character.

Recall that in chapter four, I have explained that while it might be said that a virtuous state of character is a necessary – but not a sufficient – condition of virtuous behavior, a vicious state of character is neither necessary nor sufficient for wrongdoing; there are instances of virtuous character without behavior as well as out-of-character actions, as seen in chapter two.

True, as role players, both the dishonest and the virtuous leader may perform the same action; and both emerge with dirty hands. But that does not mean that the honest person – that is, the person who possesses the ordinary virtue of honesty – behaves dishonestly in her capacities as role occupant. Indeed, her motivations and inner states matter as much as her conduct. Hence, in order for her to behave dishonestly, she would need to behave as the dishonest person does. But she does not.²⁹ The virtuous person feels regret and pain while performing these unjust, dishonest, and ruthless actions allegedly demanded by her role.³⁰ In contrast, the dishonest person does not experience such emotions; he might even enjoy – or at least disregard – the dark side of his performance as a role player, as Fox television’s “24” fictional character Jack Bauer appears to do.

²⁹ An action that may look like the action of a virtuous person – such as speaking the truth or helping others – may realize its ends without being from a virtuous state of character. Even the most unscrupulous person can tell the truth; that is why we have strong reasons to resist the reduction of virtue to behavioral dispositions, as it was discussed in chapter two.

³⁰ Notice that I am not denying the possibility of enforced dirty hands; but I do not think dirty hands cases are a characteristic feature of morally justified institutional roles. They are less common than the objector may suggest.

For a virtue ethical account of roles, the agent's emotional reactions and his willingness to acknowledge and bear his guilt are an important piece of evidence for the attribution of virtue and vice. Granted, a person who possesses good character traits *qua* human being may occasionally behave inconsistently with a moral rule such as a prohibition to lie or bluff when performing role-related behavior. But what defines the role player as a virtuous player here is a propensity to break the rule not to lie with reluctance and pain.

If sometimes the agent cannot emerge with clean hands, if even the putatively virtuous person would lie or bluff, it is simply incorrect to describe her action as a reflection of the ordinary virtue of honesty. If there was no virtuous choice to be made, the virtuous person did not choose to do X. Admittedly, if there is no virtuous choice to be made, a virtue ethical account of roles may not provide the best guidance for the agent on what to do but it can still say a lot about the virtuous person's unintentional reactions while performing actions that appear to be against virtue. Perhaps, as Hursthouse argues, the agent "must live out the rest of her natural life haunted by remorse" (1995: 66).

It may not be just bad feelings and remorse, though. Consider the case of lying. There are good reasons for telling the truth and for being in the habit of telling the truth. We have little respect for and do not attribute virtue to a person who lies when there are minor considerations in favor of doing so. The habit of telling the truth is supposed to cause the agent to tell the truth even when it is inconvenient. Yet we applaud lying to the Nazis. Aristotle claims that a person of good character knows how to apply principles in tough situations. But the test of application cannot be a neat utilitarian one. So, besides feeling bad about lying, there is still a problem for the agent: the problem of deciding

when to lie. A problem compounded by our strong intuition that lying is sometimes wrong despite its good consequences. And when the virtuous person has made that decision as thoughtfully as possible, the question is how deeply she can really regret it. One does the best that one can do. Still, it is important that a virtuous person has regrets about doing what is necessary. It is part of being the sort of person a virtuous person is.³¹

In sum, role virtues are not just a matter of behavior or merely behavioral dispositions. Provided that the injunctions of role morality sometimes involve dirty hands situations, we still have a lot to say about inner states of character and guilty feelings when facing tragic dilemmas. More than one good character trait may lead to the same behavior and a single trait may lead to different courses of action.

The appropriateness of certain character traits to a particular role or position should then be assessed in terms of how well the role or position serves the proper end of the institution. There are enough reasons to resist the two assumptions on which the first objection relies, namely, that role virtues entail irresolvable conflicts with ordinary virtues and that roles entail pervasive situations of tragic choices. Both assumptions may be correct in Tony Soprano's role, but in that case what fails is the justification of the institution. The proper traits of a Mafia boss must be determined according to how those traits serve the ends of organized crime and private "protection." But we cannot connect the character traits of a good Mafia boss as a role-player with an important human good without which human beings cannot flourish – or with the good of the community under a non-eudaimonistic theory of virtue – which is the condition to justify roles and professions.

³¹ There may be times when, all things considered, lying has the best consequences but is still wrong, even if the agent carefully considers all things. For lying makes the agent a worse person. Unless it is a tragic case. This relates to the second objection.

The bad habituation objection is even more serious than the dirty hands challenge but it does not succeed either. It might be true that if role virtues recurrently conflict with ordinary virtues the agent will end up acquiring certain vicious character traits such that she will not be able to switch from being honest, caring, and compassionate *qua* person to being dishonest, callous, and merciless as role-player.

But even if virtue involves habituation, that does not exhaust the notion of virtue. The process of acquiring virtues is increasingly reflective, as explained in chapter two. First, a person just performs an action, then she gets into the habit of doing it, then she understands why she does it. Then she gets better at determining when to do it. Eventually she gets involved in dialectic about it. That is consistent with Aristotle's contention that young people are not really virtuous. Only a person with a properly formed character will be able to benefit from the abstract study of ethics, because only such a person can apply universal considerations to particular cases correctly (NE, 1095 a1-10, 1095 b1-10, 1103 b5-10, 1114a32, 1141 b14-20, 1149a32). The understanding of virtue as habits downplays the importance of deliberation and reflection. Albeit the fully virtuous agent does not need to stop and deliberate each time he performs an act – because once he has formed a good habit the associated action will often be automatic – the analogy of the hockey-player underestimates the significance of critical thinking in a virtue ethical account of roles.

Recall that, in chapter two, I have examined two alternative conceptualizations of virtue. My target, the reductive conception of virtue, entails a twofold claim, namely, that virtues are behavioral dispositions to act as moral principles and rules direct (Gewirth, 1978) and that virtues unfailingly lead to trait-relevant behavior in the appropriate

eliciting conditions (Doris, 2002). That view is problematic because it is too concerned with the evaluation of actions and the primacy of rules and so it does not take character seriously, as I have explained. We expect the person of good character to respond to a situation in excellent ways but also for the right reasons and out of the correct desires, beliefs, and values. The person must know that what she does is good and she must choose to obey reason's judgment. That is absent in a reductive account of role virtues.

Furthermore, I argue that roles do not characteristically lead to the cultivation of vicious character traits. In other words, I maintain that role virtues are not characteristically ordinary vices – as in the case of the business virtue of toughness, which is “not divorced from ordinary morals” (Solomon, 1992: 336) – and that those ordinary vices like hypocrisy and cruelty, which may serve the goals of institutional roles and professions, should not count as role virtues. For example, one may argue that some ordinary vices that may serve the legal profession's goals should not count as role virtues (e.g., zealous advocacy of the lawyer's client by allowing him to present to the court testimony that is known to be perjurious by the lawyer and the client).³²

Roles do not necessarily lead to ordinary vices. Some institutions and profession which do not involve a commitment to some important human good may demand from its members a number of character traits that constitute ordinary vices. But the problem is, again, with the moral justification of the profession/ institution rather than with the acquisition of bad habits through occupational roles.³³

³² Monroe Freedman (1975) is a champion of this strict understanding of professional morality in the legal profession.

³³ As it was explained in the previous section, some scholars claim that once an institution or profession has been morally justified and the role is justified by appealing to the structure of the institution, then the mandates of role morality bear decisive weight on how the role occupant ought to behave. Such an argument is question begging. Even if a role or profession has been properly established, that does not mean that the requirements of a role that entail ordinary vices will trump broader ordinary virtues.

Finally, the bad habituation objection and the objector's exclusive concern on the evaluation of actions and moral rules fail to capture the whole picture of human beings trying to integrate conflicting roles and positions into a single life. Ultimately, we are our roles, we self-select ourselves into institutions and professions, and we choose the kind of situations and dilemmas we will experience. And we have at least some influence in the design and delineation of our roles and positions, hence, on the standards that define the suitability of certain character traits to those roles and positions. In other words, we are responsible for the demands of our positions; they are not merely there, given to us. And we integrate our social, occupational, and professional roles into personal patterns. What looks like alienated role-players who are forced to do wrong whatever they choose are indeed moral agents who embrace voluntary occupations, create and shape their positions, and struggle against the fragmentation of the self.

5.7. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the morality of institutional and occupational roles is still a fundamental concern in professional ethics and business ethics. And it is essential for a theory of virtue because institutional affiliations and social roles play an important part in constituting moral character. They are persistent and morally central attributes of humans and they are part of the moral virtues. We can become better persons together in a way that we cannot by ourselves, by engaging in common projects and institutional commitments. An important dimension of our life is lived through those institutions and professions.

The dilemma of role ethics is that either role demands conflict with more general moral requirements or they do not. If role and ordinary morality collide, then the agent is

trapped into a steady stream of tragic dilemmas which are not satisfactorily addressed by mainstream ethical theory. Either action-based normative theories provide the right tools to deal with the alleged conflicts between moral obligations *qua* human beings and the demands of institutional roles – in which case institutional and roles demands are redundant and roles are diluted to a point where the distinctive institutional goals they serve are construed merely in terms of universal principles – or those normative theories are pointless because they fail to capture significant role-related commitments and characteristic sensitivities of my station and its duties. On the contrary, if the demands of occupational roles do not conflict with the injunctions of ordinary morality, then either there is nothing morally distinctive about roles and positions – that is, any ethical response is merely a response *qua* moral person – or institutional goals and positions are regarded as amoral and so they cannot be assessed on the basis of the general requirements of morality. Both alternatives are problematic because they either do not take institutional roles seriously or they take them too seriously.

In order to do justice to the special commitments generated by institutional roles and positions without falling into the unrestricted pursuit of institutional interests, in this chapter I have argued for a virtue ethical account of roles which holds that the achievement of virtue entails meeting not only the standard of the virtuous person but also the excellences that define the roles and positions the agent occupies.

I have defended the argument that standards of goodness are role-differentiated and hence, virtues are best understood contextually; they are embedded in our social institutions and professions and they are contoured in context. There is a characteristic

way of choosing, feeling, desiring, and reacting well – and of choosing, feeling, desiring and reacting defectively – in each sphere of human experience.

There are two senses of virtue in my account, namely, ordinary virtues and role virtues; they are specified at different levels of generality. Whereas role virtues are specified as character traits that are appropriate in a certain sphere, ordinary virtues are defined in relation to a universal domain of experience that is not fixed by institutional positions. Ordinary virtues are shaped by role features and role virtues are constrained by the general requirements of ordinary virtues; they are not characteristically in conflict in the way that role obligations and obligations *qua* persons are.

Ultimately, role virtues are an essential part of what it means to be a good human being, and so the claim that they are intrinsically in conflict with ordinary virtues or merely an addition to a comprehensive account of goodness is untenable. Role virtues are not ordinary vices, and although they may occasionally lead to non-virtuous behavioral manifestations – such as in the case of the business virtue of toughness – they are still virtues.

We are our roles; we play different social, institutional, corporate, and professional roles; hence, the worries about the disintegration and fragmentation of the self arise. The theory of virtue I advocate here suggests that the agent can and should disassociate herself from the roles she chooses not to identify with. That would be the sort of psychological integration between personal life and institutional roles that is characteristic of a person of good character. A virtuous person reconciles the demands of professionalism and emotional distance and the pursuit of psychic harmony while avoiding the difficulties of professional detachment. A person of good character decides,

before he confronts temptations, that there are some things that he just will not do no matter what. Self-management is, also, one of the keys to good character.

EPILOGUE

TOWARDS A THEORY OF VIRTUE

“In practice the theory or ideal is never perfectly fulfilled; in other words, man never attains perfection, but only approaches towards it. It is impossible to draw a mathematically straight line – all lines are but approximations to the ideal; such incomplete fulfillment of the ideal is the inevitable condition of life, as is not sin – everyone advances towards the ideal according to his powers. But concession, or compromise in theory, is a great sin. If I, knowing that a straight line is a mathematical conception, try to draw one, I shall attain an approximation to a straight line; but if, seeing that it is impossible to draw a perfect line, I decide that I may deviate from the ideal of the straight line, then I stray away (...)”

Leo Tolstoy, “The Meaning of Life”

It has been the endeavor of this dissertation to contribute to the development of a theory of virtue in organizations that takes character seriously, where aretaic concepts are more basic than actions and rules. Agents and their traits are ethically central. And what lies behind behavior is as important as behavior itself. That does not deny the importance of principles and conduct, which remain an important territory of morality. It does not deny the ethical significance of behavior either, which is a central concern in business ethics research. But actions and behavior are not enough. Aristotle puts it nicely:

“... what is true of crafts is not true of virtues. For the products of a craft determine by their own qualities whether they have been produced well; and so it suffices that they have the right qualities when they have been produced. But for actions in accord with the virtues to be done temperately or justly it does not suffice that they themselves have the right qualities. Rather, the agent must also be in the right state when he does them (...) Hence, actions are called just or temperate when they are the sort that a just or a temperate person would do. But the just and temperate person is not the one who [merely] does these actions, but the one who also does

them in the way in which just or temperate people do them.” (NE, 1105a25ff)

As explained in the introductory remarks, a comprehensive theory of virtue should respond to at least five important questions. A full theory of virtue should tell us what virtue is (and what vice is). It should also tell us which character traits are virtues and which are vices. It should tell us why these character traits are good ones to have. It should provide an account of the connection between virtue and rightness. And it should tell us whether the virtues are the same for everyone, everywhere, everywhen or whether they differ from culture to culture, from time to time, or even from person to person. Here I have completed the first few steps.

The concluding chapter summarizes the six central claims advanced in this dissertation and the relation of these claims to the main lines of debate in the field. Furthermore, it provides additional connections among the chapters. Let us start recapitulating what we have accomplished in this work.

First, I have argued that normative theorizing in business ethics should recognize as an important constraint a number of facts about human nature and society, specifically, the kind of persons we are, what we can actually achieve, and the type of cognitive and motivational structures that we possess. For moral systems and standards that overlook human capacities are not ideal systems, as in the initial quote by Tolstoy, but no standards at all. The evidence in psychology shows that we are not typically capable of certain states such as complete impartiality or treating everyone for one and no one for more than one. Even if we could, we should not want to be like that. So, I have defended the claim that all ethical theories must be psychologically realistic, in the sense that their moral demands should not be beyond the capacity of the sort of people we should want

there to be. And I have built the requirement of psychological realism along the lines of the *ought implies can* principle. I have supplied three arguments for psychological realism. It is unreasonable to exhort a person to do what she cannot do. It is not appropriate to blame her for doing (or failing to do) what she is unable to do (or what she cannot not control doing so). And we no longer say that a person ought to do something when we realize that she cannot do it (at most, we ask what the person should do instead of the original act she had to perform). I have introduced and discussed a number of objections to the three arguments for psychological realism, including the objection that it conflicts with the is/ought distinction. But the objections do not succeed. Hence, there are enough grounds to justify psychological realism: normative theories in business ethics are constrained by the capacities of a particular class of actual persons, the “ones we should want there to be.”

Second, I have outlined the basis and the structure of a theory of virtue that takes character seriously. And I have substantiated the claim that virtues are thick ethical concepts. Judgments of character are responsive to matters of facts and matters of valuation. In that respect, the theory of virtue advocated here fares better than competing normative theories in business ethics – namely, deontological, consequentialist, and contractualist theories – in bringing together explanations and justifications of behavior (as well evaluations of persons). And it provides a natural account of moral motivation that allows it to pass the test of psychological realism. In turn, the requirement of psychological realism poses three constraints on the theory defended here: as a matter of psychological fact, there must be character traits, people can differ in the character traits they have, and people can develop the sort of traits postulated by the theory. I have

shown that the theory of virtue advocated here can meet these constraints and so it offers better hope of being psychologically realistic than other prominent pictures of the moral life both in general and in the context of business organizations.

Third, I have offered a response to the first question to which any virtue theory must respond, namely, what virtue is, in connection with the moral status of aretaic notions in normative ethics. I have introduced two basic strategies to conceptualize virtue, namely, a reductive or dispositional and a non-reductive account of virtue. The dispositional account defines virtues as behavioral dispositions to act in accordance with certain principles or rules of conduct. I have presented four decisive objections against the reductive approach: it has weak explanatory power, it does not provide an account of the interaction between traits and other mental states, it cannot successfully deal with cases of virtue in the absence of behavior, and it makes the talk of character and virtue meaningless. In contrast, I have defended a non-reductive account, which conceptualizes virtues as character traits that are not reducible to behavioral dispositions. Roughly, I define character as a person's collection of higher-order and first-order desires, values, beliefs, framing capacities, emotions, and enduring patterns of behavior that have any bearing on moral matters. My account is non-reductive because although these elements of character are interrelated, they cannot be described solely in terms of one of the others, and they cannot be reduced to principles or rules of behavior. The distinction between the reductive and the non-reductive accounts of virtue is crucial because it has to do with the status of character in normative theorizing in business ethics. The reductive account entails the claim that all that matters in ethics is to identify the right principles that determine what actions are morally correct and so character has a secondary role. Under

the non-reductive account, deontic notions do not have normative priority over character concepts. Therefore, I have argued that a theory of virtue that takes character seriously should be non-reductive. I have also shown that at least some virtues, such as the virtue of gratitude and the virtue of self-respect, do not conform to the reductive approach, in the sense that they cannot be reduced to dispositions to obey the duty of gratitude and the duty of self-respect without losing the essence of these virtues and the usage of the words ‘gratitude’ and ‘self-respect.’ Possessing the virtues entails the cultivation of certain (good) inner states that are valued independently from the actions that they may result in.

Fourth, I have examined the question of what it means to ascribe virtues and the related inquiry of what are the individual differences that underlie trait attributions. Some scholars argue that we can investigate the appropriateness of trait attribution without theorizing about traits. I have argued that the argument on the irrelevance of trait analysis for trait attributions does not hold. The linear model of trait attribution supplies a deficient account of character ascriptions. I have supplied a prototype account of trait attributions that integrates the literature on cognitive science and social categorizations to conceptualize traits, which fares well with reference to ascriptions of virtue (and vice). Finally, I have proposed an account of *akrasia* as an approximation to what the individual differences that underlie behavior are. I have claimed that ascriptions of virtue and vice serve explanatory, descriptive, and evaluative functions. While in its descriptive dimension trait attribution entails no particular mechanism by which the behavior was caused, an explanatory ascription of virtue carries a commitment to the existence of some causal mechanism. We cannot start making descriptive attributions and move from there to explanatory attributions because folk attributions may not necessarily track the causes

of individual differences in behavior. So, if folk attributions are not good trackers of explanatory traits, it follows that we have no reasons to expect cross-situational and cross-temporal consistency in people's behavior.

Fifth, I have reconstructed and disputed the situationist objection to the theory of virtue advocated here. The situationist challenge is an objection from psychological realism. The empirical evidence on experimental social psychology casts doubts on the existence of character traits. In response to the situationist attack, I have posed six methodological objections and four conceptual objections to the claim that there are no robust character traits and that character does not make any significant contribution to explanations of behavior whatsoever. I have shown that the situationist challenge is not successful in proving that the theory of virtue outlined in chapter one is psychologically unrealistic. The situationist argument fails because virtue ethics is incorrectly reconstructed as a dispositionalist theory and because the empirical evidence does not truly discredit the determinative influence of traits on human behavior. Situationism holds a reductive notion of virtue, which I have argued is untenable. And the empirical data from experimental psychology do not discredit either personality psychology or virtue ethics. Indeed, I have presented a body of empirical literature on dispositional effects in psychology and organizational scholarship that disproves the situationist claim. Everyone knows that virtues do not express themselves under all circumstances, and also that agents may be very rigid in their ability to understand how a situation is to be seen in terms of virtues. And there might be imaginable circumstances where everyone, even saints and heroes, would behave in a morally inadequate way. None of this, however, undermines the moral psychology that underlies the theory of virtue defended here.

Sixth, I have proposed a virtue ethical account of roles that can successfully deal with the problem of role morality. The points about the external determination of the virtues and their ascription serve to remind us that a person's character depends in many different ways on his relations to society, not simply in the sense of being acquired from society and reinforced (or weakened) by environmental forces, but also in the ways in which they are constructed from social materials. Institutional affiliations and social roles play an important part in constituting moral character. The problem of role ethics is that role demands are said to conflict with more general moral requirements. Or, if they do not, then there is nothing morally distinctive about institutional positions. In order to do justice to the special commitments created by roles without falling into the unrestricted pursuit of institutional interests, I have advanced a character-based account of roles which holds that the achievement of virtue entails meeting not only the standard of the virtuous person but also the excellences associated with roles and stations. I have defended the argument that standards of goodness are role-differentiated and, hence, virtues are better understood contextually. For there is a characteristic way of choosing, feeling, desiring, and reacting well (and defectively) in each sphere of human experience. I have proposed a distinction between two senses of virtue, namely, ordinary virtues and role virtues. They are specified at different levels of generality in my account. Role virtues are specified as traits that are appropriate in a certain sphere. And ordinary virtues are defined with reference to a universal domain of experience that is unrelated to institutional positions. Then, I have shown that ordinary virtues are shaped by role features and, in turn, role virtues are constrained by the general requirements of ordinary

virtues. Role virtues are an essential part of what it means to be a good human being, and so the claim that they are characteristically in conflict with ordinary virtues is untenable.

So much for the claims advanced in this dissertation. There may still be an objection to my definitional project. For, in a narrow sense, virtues are dispositional. The names we have for them are dispositional, at least. We might say that Shaquille O’Neal can bench press 500 pounds because he is strong, or that his ability to bench press 500 pounds indicates his strength. We are not explaining much by saying that, though. But we are suggesting that there is a further explanation to be found if we investigate the state of Shaq’s legs, arms, etc.

It is in this spirit that Davidson argued that mental states can cause actions even if we often describe a mental state in dispositional terms – for example, “a desire to do action A.” Before Davidson, some philosophers argued that desires could not cause actions because the relationship between them was one of necessity rather than contingency. But if we think that such a desire supervenes on some state of the person that does have a causal relationship to a subsequent action, then there is no problem about causality.

Here is a possible analogy. The word ‘sunset’ seems to refer to the event of the sun falling below the horizon; that event is by definition a sunset. The word also seems to presuppose that the sun revolves around the earth. But we use the word without intending the apparent presupposition, because we know that there is a theory that explains the phenomenon and predicts the times and places of its future occurrences. We know that the sun does not revolve around the earth.

Yet, the analogy does not quite work. If the true causal relationship is between two events that are supervened on by courage and a courageous action, then the correct statement of the covering law does not mention courage, though it mentions some state that is contingently identical with courage in some cases. Unlike the sunset case, we do not know what the covering law is. In particular, we know very little about the occurrent characteristics of the underlying states. So the covering law might well apply to any case in which the agent gets between a charging dog and a child. Or it might be like the relationship between tossing a match and starting a fire; whether the fire starts will depend on the circumstances, as one's willingness to confront the dog may depend on the circumstances. That is how it is with most causal relationships. We can use both courage and tossing matches in explaining certain events, even if we know no details about how either works. It would be foolish to say that tossing a match does not really cause a fire because the presence of oxygen and combustible material is required. It would be equally foolish to deny that courage matters just because circumstances do. Courage is a good thing, and tossing matches about indiscriminately is a bad thing.

Another concern is raised by Situationism. Courage is supposed to be a wide-ranging virtue. A brave person is one who can not only confront the savage dog but also cheerfully face the dentist. Yet, in actual fact, they claim, we have evidence that some people who are brave about dogs are fearful of dentists. People may exhibit substantial reliability in their behavior, Doris argues. But the trait-relevant behavior will be displayed only in the trait-relevant eliciting conditions, which are specified quite narrowly. Then, behavioral reliability is highly specific and so insufficient for global trait attribution.

Perhaps, then, we should countenance narrow-gauged virtues, like dog-courage and dentist-courage. But this does seem to rob virtues of some of their usefulness. It is hard to see how they could explain anything more than dispositional states explain, or how they could be more than habits.

In one sort of person, however, we may see a carryover from the dog case to the dentist case, as we have seen in the case of Hugh Thompson Jr., a disobedient subject of the Milgram experiment and later the whistleblower of the My Lai massacre. This may be the sort of person who is not merely unreflectively courageous – in whom, that is, courage is not just a habit – but acts on rational understanding of good and harm. Such a person may feel some apprehension about visiting the dentist but then reflect that putting off the needed appointment is cowardly, hence irrational, and will then make the appointment and show up for it. Perhaps after a few repetitions, the person will not even mind visiting the dentist.

This level of rationality may be rare. It requires extraordinary feats of reflection and self-command. It requires being able to recognize a situation as one for which courage is appropriate. Most people are not so rational, hence not so courageous. So when we explain Thompson's getting between the U.S. ground troops and the fleeing Vietnamese civilians by saying that he is courageous, we mean that that sort of act, narrowly described, is the sort of thing he typically does. It is not that he is drunk or showing off, for example. If we said that without knowing whether Thompson was rational enough to connect that sort of act with confronting the savage dog and going to the dentist, then we would be attributing something like a dispositional state to him. But if he can reflect about the values involved in confronting the ground forces personally,

then he can probably be equally rational in other cases as well. Perhaps very few people are, however, and it is reckless of us to suppose otherwise.

Rationality seems to be the problem, then. Most people may have too little of it. They are influenced by emotion, by social pressures, by phobias, by cues of which they are unaware. Often they rationalize, as the subjects of the psychological experiments do. Melville said of the odious Claggart in *Billy Budd* that his conscience was lawyer to his will. And so in general we find justifications for what we want to do. Even some people who are rational in some respects – in making political decisions, for example – are not at all rational in others, such as making decisions about their children.

A virtue ethical description of the person of good character – from Aristotle to Williams – is not just a description of how people usually are. It is aspirational, as descriptions of how people ought to be typically are aspirational. As in the initial quote by Tolstoy, if knowing that drawing a perfectly straight line is impossible I decide that I may deviate from the ideal of the straight line, then I will stray away. A virtue ethical moral psychology is normative rather than merely descriptive in that important sense. But there remains a significant difference between Aristotelian ethics and, say, deontological ethics. For Kant thinks that selfishness is natural. Aristotle thinks that good character is as natural as a great tree that springs from an acorn, though he understands that most acorns, like most human seeds, never achieve that sort of greatness.

Yet there are at least some people who have become rational and others fairly rational. Even those who are not particularly rational see the point of rationality. And even in the absence of wholly rational people, we often successfully explain behavior by presupposing that it is rational.

In sum, there are still reasons for believing that virtues are more than dispositions and that they do explain behavior. Does naming a virtue explain action? In Chapter Three I have argued that the dispositional analysis does not explain behavior, but only summarizes it. Explanation requires some substantive mechanism.

But suppose a person falls asleep during a lecture. If we say that he took a sleeping pill, that may be a pretty good explanation, despite Moliere's joke. In the case of benevolence, we might say that Paul Rusesabagina did something because he really is a benevolent guy, not a fraud. The very fact that there are many possible influences, psychological and environmental, on an act helps make an attribution of even a dispositional virtue explanatory. But we have reasons to demand more of a virtue than the dispositional analysis affords. If all we are saying is that Paul has a habit of acting benevolently, then we will respond that we are not even attributing benevolence to him. A really benevolent person not only habitually acts in a certain way but also has good reason to do so and knows the difference between being benevolent and being over-generous. In fact moral education, presumably including dialectic, is a matter of getting from a habit to a true virtue, which is among other things a rational state.

A descriptive trait attribution implies no particular mechanism by which the behavior was caused, whereas an explanatory attribution carries a commitment to the existence of some causal mechanism. Through one's natural endowments and education and experience, a person develops a virtue that causes her (motivates her) to do virtuous acts. The causal mechanism is reflected in the so-called practical syllogism. The first premise states some ethical belief; the second premise states that this situation is an occasion for the application of the ethical belief. But what happens with people of

inferior character is that they do not frame the situation appropriately. They ought to say that the salient fact of the situation is that there is someone who needs help; what they do instead is frame the situation as one in which they are in a hurry. A benevolent person does not merely have benevolent desires. A benevolent person sees that the salient description of certain situations emphasizes the need for and appropriateness of help or understanding.

A choice is then caused by a settled, higher-order desire plus a framing of the current situation. And the framing may be seen not as a situational variable but as a source of differences in individual behavior. Indeed, it is part of one's character. And some scholars claim to have found evidence that individuals do have fairly steady traits in this area: the "principle of construal," for example, is a function of the social value orientation of the agent (Ross and Nisbett, 1990; Gold, 2006).

There is also the emotional component of virtue. Virtue is not just the domestication of one's feelings. For if feelings are just controlled by virtue, then all that matters is to give virtue an intellectual direction. Though rationality is important, changes in ethical beliefs have to become rooted in one's emotional life before they can be effective. Virtue is much more than self-control. Having a virtue is having one's character developed in such a way that one not only grasps what the right thing to do is but also enjoys doing it; one is repelled by the thought of wrong action. And one is not seriously tempted by incentives not to do the right action.

One might have a poorly developed character and still become virtuous. Iris Murdoch eloquently illustrates how we engage in such a process of character transformation:

“A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M does not like D’s accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. Let us assume for purposes of the example that the mother, who is a very ‘correct’ person, behaves beautifully to the girl throughout, not allowing her real opinion to appear in any way. We might underline this aspect of the example by supposing that the young couple have emigrated or that D is now dead: the point being to ensure that whatever is in question as happening happens entirely in M’s mind... Time passes, and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D, imprisoned... by the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl. However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: ‘I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.’ Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. If we take D to be now absent or dead this can make it clear that the change is not in D’s behavior but in M’s mind. D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. And as I say, *ex hypothesi*, M’s outward behavior, beautiful from the start, in no way alters.” (Murdoch, 1971: 17)

Murdoch’s story highlights an important point. The mother-in-law behaves perfectly toward her daughter-in-law, though she finds herself harboring bitter and envious feelings. She focuses on superficial and unattractive traits of her daughter-in-law. Eventually, she criticizes the roots of her own selfish passions and works hard to see her daughter-in-law truly, until she is able to replace her egoistic views with more positive ones. Her passions transform themselves accordingly. Yet, her behavior, always perfectly controlled, does not alter.

Murdoch describes the woman’s thinking as proper and that is what produces propriety in acting, not the other way around. M changes herself by gradually changing her higher-order desires, through deliberate acts of attention, by seeing the younger

woman, which in turn changes her first-order desires. M has done morally significant work. She has become a person of good character, a person to whom we would ascribe virtue, rather than merely continence.

I began this investigation, and I would like to conclude it, by demarcating the territory of virtue and the territory of rightness. The theory of moral worth and the theory of moral obligation are the central chapters of ethical theory. We certainly expect the person of good character to perform good deeds. But right action, moral principles, decision-making, and behavior do not exhaust the domain of morality. For many of our most significant accomplishments have to do with our inner states. The property of rightness is something that emerges from the character traits of persons. And our choices and conduct are likely to represent continuity in an already settled pattern of life.

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